

Return to the Gateway: Enshrining the Immigrant in 1980s America

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BOSTON COLLEGE
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RETURN TO THE GATEWAY:
ENSHRINING THE IMMIGRANT IN 1980s AMERICA

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– INTRODUCTION –
Johnson Sets the Stage in 1965

On May 11, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Proclamation 3656, adding Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty National Monument. The proclamation recognized the immigration depot as a “temporary shelter” for the people who “were important to America for their contribution in making the United States of America the world leader it is today.”¹ The *New York Times* front page headline announced it was now a “national shrine.” Borrowing the words of Walt Whitman, Louis Adamic, and his predecessor John F. Kennedy, Johnson hailed the millions of immigrants who had passed through by declaring, “They made us not just a nation, but a nation of nations.”² The proclamation was not much more than a symbolic gesture. The former immigration station, which had been out of service for 11 years, would continue to be neglected; money would not be appropriated until 1975. Shrines are not created overnight. A combination of political and social forces would come together in the following decade to ensure that this shrine’s potential be fully realized in the American psyche.

This thesis will explore those factors that contributed to the enshrinement of Ellis Island and the adjacent places relevant to the Old World immigrant narrative. In the 1970s and 1980s, public attentiveness to ethnic identity affected the character of historic preservation, prompting the creation of new symbols of American history. This thesis will also show how the ethnic revival helped draw attention to aspects of American life such as urban living, and provoked

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Proclamation 3656,” May 11, 1965, in *American Presidency Project*, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters (Santa Barbara, C.A.: University of California), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=75266&st=&st1=> (accessed December 8, 2007).

² Charles Mohr, “Ellis Island Made National Shrine,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1965. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The New York Times (1851 - 2004).

public discourse and scholarly research to attend to the people that history previously overlooked.

Johnson's acknowledgement of Ellis Island in 1965 was part of the attention given to the role of immigrants in American history at the time. Two years before, Daniel P. Moynihan and Nathan Glazer's book *Beyond the Melting Pot* had denied that the "melting pot" paradigm had ever existed.³ Their idea caught on, and the melting pot became, in the words of historian Rudolph Vecoli, an "obsolete symbol of a coercive and unsuccessful Americanization policy ... relegated to the junkheap of history."⁴ The Red Scare and the fear of being labeled "un-American" for lack of conformity and assimilation were quickly fading in the minds of Americans. "Americanism" was now a "love of continuity and respect for the past," writes Michael Kammen.⁵ The demand for national unity, facilitated by World War II and Cold War, had faded. This turn to reclaiming identity, Vecoli contended, "did not so much create a new consciousness as sanction the expression of group identities which had been long repressed."

It was at this time, in light of the successes of the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Acts and further fueled by an anti-modernist spirit, hyphenated Americans (the Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans) as historian Matthey Frye Jacobson describes, "quit the melting pot." The ethnic revival was characterized by traditional festivals, an increased prominence of old and new organizations, and an increased interest in ancestral history, culture, and language."⁶ The revival appeared to be inclusive across class lines, embraced by both presidents and the everyday man.

³ Glazer, Nathan and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. Cambridge, M.A.: M.I.T. Press, 1963.

⁴ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot: Ethnicity in the United States in the Eighties," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5:1 (Fall 1985): page. *Periodicals Archive Online*. <http://pao.chadwyck.com> (accessed March 20, 2008).

⁵ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 657.

⁶ Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot," 7.

This reclamation of an identity, which had been stifled for decades, affected the public sphere in politics, in history textbooks, and “wholly new ways of imagining the nation and articulating the individual citizen’s place within it and relationship to it.”⁷

An understanding of the atmosphere of the sixties is important to the study of what happened in the following decades. Johnson’s proclamation was also indicative of a shift of attention to the nation’s urban areas, which had been neglected and allowed to deteriorate as residents left for the suburbs. The Great Society experiment brought the nation’s focus to the city. Cities were in a crisis, Johnson had said in 1964, and he believed “society will never be great until our cities are great.”⁸ With the proclamation, not only was Ellis Island to be a national monument, but its rehabilitation was to be completed in conjunction with the greening of the New Jersey shoreline. There, Johnson established a Job Corps Conservation Center for the restorations.⁹ The two efforts together comprised the \$6 million federally-funded project. A few hundred miles south of New York Harbor, in the Rose Garden of the White House, the president explained the proclamation:

This exciting Federal-State project will preserve a bright chapter in American history. It will bring beauty where there is now blight. It will demonstrate at the very doorstep of our largest metropolis the opportunity that is offered us if we are wise enough to cherish our authentic historic places and accept the challenge of the new conservation.¹⁰

The “new conservation” effort represented the work of Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, one of Johnson’s strongest supporters from the Kennedy administration. Udall insisted that “the total environment is now the concern, and the new conservatism makes man, himself, its

⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 18.

⁸ Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 356.

⁹ “Jersey City Deeds Site For Liberty State Park,” *NYT*, August 18, 1965.

¹⁰ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing Proclamation Adding Ellis Island to the Liberty Island National Monument,” May 11, 1965, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26955&st=&st1=> (accessed December 8, 2007).

subject.” His goal of environmentalism expanded the natural preservation of the Progressive Era to also preserve the quality of life in cities and towns.¹¹ The creation of Liberty State Park and subsequently the annual festival that came to be celebrated there became symbols of a new Great Society urbanism, defined by its ethnic face.

The proclamation was also one stop along the year’s opportunities to espouse the benefits of lifting the nation’s tight immigration restrictions, in place since 1924. Along with his other announcements, Johnson articulated his hope that Congress would “draw on the lessons of Ellis Island and enact legislation to provide America with a wise immigration policy adapted to the needs of the 1960’s.” He looked to replace the national origins quota system with one that first considered the skills of immigrants and family ties to U.S. citizens.¹² Johnson’s Immigration Bill would pass that October. The chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Emmanuel Celler, oversaw the drafting of the new law and helped win big margins for it in both houses. Celler, a Jewish-American from Brooklyn, had been fighting the quota for the past five decades in Congress. Historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin note that it was no coincidence that the congressman won his crusade for the new law in the same year as the Voting Rights Act. The same principals of equal rights were reflected in this bill, which abolished the quota system with an “implied hierarchy of racial and ethnic desirability.”¹³

In the 1960s, both African Americans and white ethnics became more politically assertive, more willing to organize collectively to seek group benefits, and more prepared to use the courts and public forums to address their grievances than ever before, write David R. Colbum and George E. Pozzetta. The historians demonstrate that the movements were “ways of defining

¹¹ Randall B. Woods, *Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 427 and 662.

¹² Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing Proclamation Adding Ellis Island to the Liberty Island National Monument.”

¹³ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 146-147.

how government should be constructed and how the political system was supposed to provide an equitable process of governance,” but each with different aims.¹⁴ African Americans sought the reconfiguration of their role in the liberal, capitalist state. The resulting affirmative action programs were instituted to abolish the inherent racisms of the system. Ethnic Americans wanted national recognition and respect that they believed they had earned through their social and economic achievements and through the strength of their family structures.¹⁵

By the mid-1970s, the nation had become engrossed with its roots. It was “the decade of the ethnics,” as Michael Novak coined in his book *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnic*.¹⁶ He characterized an ethnic group as “a group with historical memory, real or imaginary.” The miniseries and book by Alex Haley, *Roots*, spurred a nationwide phenomenon. Broadcast in January 1977, *Roots* beckoned all Americans, not only African Americans, to conduct their own genealogical research, and trace their origins back to their own family villages.¹⁷ No politician would deny the diverse make-up of the nation. America was, after all, a nation of nations. But the storylines that emerged were used to fulfill different political objectives. The liberal rights movements of the sixties demanded attention to the downtrodden and respect for those who made their contributions to the nation. The instability and radicalism of the 1960s was enough impetus for many to seek a path to self-identity, and also reevaluate political party affiliations. Disturbances to the social fabric such as rioting, welfare, black power, feminism, gay rights,

¹⁴ David R. Colburn and George E. Pozzetta, “Race, Ethnicity, and the Evolution of Political Legitimacy,” in *The Sixties: From History to Memory*, ed. David Farber (University of North Carolina Press: 1994), 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Michael Novak, *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 46. Novak’s usage of the word “ethnic” was decidedly limited, describing southern and eastern European descent, those who struggled to differentiate themselves from a WASP identity. These included: Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs, Armenians, Lebanese, Slovenes, Lithuanians, Croats, Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Estonians, Russians, Spanish and Portuguese.

¹⁷ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 43-44.

rampant drug consumption, and higher taxes “came to have varying connections with liberalism and the Left in the minds of voters.”¹⁸

Questions of identity led to intellectual and public debates about the construction of American society. John Higham saw the debate to be about history, concerning “the origins and destiny of the American people.”¹⁹ He divided the debate into two visions, one of a unified society and another a vision of separateness (a pluralistic model). From this latter vision emerged two types of pluralism in the 1970s – a more conservative one in which community and family are prominent and a more radical one that first regards economic conditions and class. Pluralism filled in where the melting pot failed, by recognizing, tolerating, and celebrating difference. “Under the various labels of nationalism, assimilation, nativism, multiculturalism, and pluralism, American identity has continually been defined as a composite incorporating diverse peoples.”²⁰ Pluralism was not as inclusive or insightful as it seemed. Vecoli saw two challenges to the paradigm. There was the Marxist critique with an emphasis on ethnic identity as “a smokescreen for racism and other reactionary politics and obscures the realities of social class.” On the other hand, the nationalist critique claimed “pluralists foment disunity and deny the existence of a common American nationality.”

As the mid-1970s and 1980s offered some perspective on the ethnic explosion, academics began to offer analyses for what it all meant. They were searching for a future of the roots movement and ethnic revival, many seeking to go *beyond* the scholarship that had brought them to that point.²¹ In his presidential address to the Immigration History Society in 1982, Higham

¹⁸ Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 72.

¹⁹ Higham, *Send These To Me*, 6-7.

²⁰ Ned Landsman and Wendy F. Katkin, “Introduction: The Construction of American Pluralism,” *Beyond Pluralism: The Conception of Groups and Group Identities in America*, ed. Katkin, Landsman, and Andrea Tyree (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2-3.

²¹ So much so, in fact, that a myriad articles and books in the following years included the word. Jules Chametzky lists examples, such as Werver Sollor’s *Beyond Ethnicity*; Chatmetzky’s “Ethnicity and Beyond;” R.

articulated this point by saying, “We are entitled to expect that scholarship, when it advances, yields more complex formulations that transcend a simple dualism.”²² This thesis explores the decade’s answers to that dualism, offered by politicians, historians and the public.

The word “ethnic” is used throughout the following chapters. Its own definition has been debated among scholars and the public. Academics like Ned Landsman and Wendy Katkin will agree that traditionally *ethnic* has been reserved for Americans of white, usually European ancestry.²³ Werner Sollers’ *Beyond Ethnicity* (1986) dedicates a chapter to the etymology of the word. The origins of “ethnic” and “ethnicity” come from the Greek word *ethnikos*, meaning “gentile” or “heathen.” Sollers deduces that the word “has retained its quality of defining another people contrastively, and often negatively.” The term as late 20th-century Americans understand it, “peculiar to a race or nation,” emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. One conflict that emerges from the “universalist and inclusive use” of the word comes when it “excludes dominant groups [Yankees and white Anglo-Saxon Protestants] and thus establishes an “ethnicity minus one.”²⁴ Sollers establishes that “ethnicity” is not identical with “class,” but often serves as a code word. “American ethnicity, then, is a matter not of content but of the importance that individuals ascribe to it, including, of course, scholars and intellectuals.” As for the relationship between race and ethnicity, Sollers chose to side with the interpretation that race is only one aspect of ethnicity, opposed to those who would consider race a category in its own right.²⁵ While “race” was a biological, fixed inheritance, “ethnicity” stressed culture. Jacobson points out that ethnicity

Radhakrishnan’s “Culture As Common Ground: Ethnicity and Beyond;” “Gurt Beulens’ “Beyond Ethnicity?” See Jules Chametzky, “Beyond Melting Pots, Cultural Pluralism, Ethnicity: Or, Déjà Vu All Over Again,” *Melus* 16:4, (Winter 1989-Winter 1990): 3-17.

²² Higham, “Presidential Address/Current Trends in the Study of Ethnicity in the United States,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2:1 (Fall 1982): 5. *Periodicals Archive Online*. <http://pao.chadwyck.com> (accessed March 20, 2008).

²³ Landsman and Katkan, “Construction of American Pluralism.”

²⁴ Werner Sollers, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-39.

“represented an outlook rather than a condition of birth; a cultural affiliation rather than a bloodline.”²⁶

In this thesis, it seems that in discussions of state matters, officials attempted to use “ethnicity” as an all-inclusive word, dismissing such past connotations. There is an obvious void in the use of the word “multi-cultural,” and that may be partly due to the fact that “multiculturalism” entered into the American lexicon only in the late 1980s. New Jersey officials fill this void with the term “multi-ethnic.” Multiculturalism and ethnicity (or multi-ethnicities), however, are not synonymous terms. Some people have associated ethnicity with only Western culture. Others, like Arthur Schlesinger Jr., understood multiculturalism to represent only non-Western and non-white cultures. The word has also been contrasted with “cultural pluralism.” Some have equated the two ideas; most see gross inequalities in their representations.²⁷ The varying interpretations led to division, as Schlesinger noted in 1990 reflecting on the past decade: “Instead of a transformative nation with a new and distinctive identity, America increasingly sees itself as preservative of old identities. We used to say *e pluribus unum*. Now we glorify *pluribus* and belittle *unum*.” The liberal historian succinctly captured public sentiment when he wrote, “The contemporary ideal is not assimilation but ethnicity.”²⁸

David Hollinger’s *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995) advanced a “postethnic perspective,” which both supported and criticized tenants of multiculturalism. Hollinger saw pluralism and cosmopolitanism as “united in the common cause of promoting ‘tolerance’ and ‘diversity.’” Both contributed to contemporary ideologies of multiculturalism.²⁹

²⁶ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 32.

²⁷ Sollors, “The Multiculturalism Debate as Cultural Text,” in *Beyond Pluralism*, 64-66.

²⁸ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “The Return to the Melting Pot,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 1990, in *From Different Shores: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Ronald Takaki, 293-295 (Oxford University Press: New York, 1994).

²⁹ David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 52.

Pluralism, however, endowed particular groups with privilege, while cosmopolitanism would “put the future of every culture at risk through the critical, sympathetic scrutiny of other cultures and is willing to contemplate the creation of new affiliations.” Pluralism would rather “protect and perpetuate particular existing cultures.”³⁰

The chapters of this thesis concentrate on the area around New York Harbor, often referred to as “the gateway,” where turn-of-the-century immigrants sailed and settled and to where public memory made its return in the late sixties, seventies, and eighties. Many Americans’ own *Roots* narratives brought them here, to the very place the immigrants began their American stories. Chapter One puts the spotlight on New Jersey, exploring how Jersey City claimed its part in the immigrant narrative, and how the state government organized its multi-ethnic character. Chapter Two opens to the national level, illustrating how the enshrinement of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty Centennial embodied the nationalism that came with the rise of conservatism. Chapter Three surveys immigrant memory in the Lower East Side, the quintessential neighborhood of nations, exploring what the Lower East Side Tenement Museum has done to pay homage to the “urban pioneers” of American history, using the past to affect contemporary immigration issues. The public memory that took shape at these historic sites resulted from not solely a revived interest in Old World ethnicity, but through a combination of factors.

In light of the popularity of the pluralist narrative, New Jersey gave official recognition to the importance of its collection of diverse communities, being one of the first states to create an Ethnic Advisory Council to handle the state’s ethnic affairs and to sponsor a multi-ethnic festival. These events, the focus of Chapter One, provided a means to reaffirm and maintain the

³⁰ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 51. See Hollinger for an extended discussion of the similarities and differences between *pluralist* and *cosmopolitan*.

positions of various groups in society. Much scholarship has focused on the ethnic revival in New York politics and culture, while its neighbor New Jersey has been slighted.³¹ The multi-ethnic festival advanced the idea of pluralism through its design as the first event inclusive of *all* of the state's "ethnic" heritages. David Steven Cohen, a member of the New Jersey Historical Society, described the dynamism of ethnicity – "Ethnic identities emerge and change," he wrote. "Immigrants become ethnic, a process which is manifested in the emergence of a sense of group identity."³² This sense of group identity manifested itself publicly in the 1960s. The Liberty Park Festival is a valuable subject of study for it represents perhaps the first state attempt to advance the spirit of pluralism, as community leaders and politicians attempted to forge a path of distinction for New Jersey. Chapter One goes beyond the festival to tell a story of urban renewal in Jersey City, a city that never lost its ethnic character, nor its ethnic politics. It was a story of the reclamation of place: the creation of a new urban park valued for its location in the gateway, a stone's throw away from the Statue of Liberty.

The pluralist storyline championed in such ethnically-aware spaces as New Jersey, came to be transformed in Ronald Reagan's nationalist quest to reaffirm a singular identity of Americans. Chapter Two focuses on the 1986 Liberty Weekend celebration. Public commentators and scholars have had much to say about the Reagan extravaganza, vocalizing their criticisms questioning the value of the Statue narrative for those presentation of ethnicity meant for all Americans. The crass commercialization also did not go unnoticed. There was more, however, to the saga. Here, in Chapter Two, the proclamation resurfaces again. Indeed, as the predecessor to Johnson's monumental Immigration Bill later that year, his May proclamation

³¹ The relationship between the states reflects that resistance to symbiosis. Dennis Gale published a book in 2006 about that relationship, titled *Greater New Jersey: Living in the Shadow of Gotham* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

³² David Steven Cohen, *Folk Legacies Revisited* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 116.

focused on New York Harbor. Since Ellis Island became linked with the Statue of Liberty National Monument, time and nostalgia, the efforts of fundraisers would work to wipe away the negative aura of the immigrant processing center to enshrine the image of its immigrants. It represented, as historian Mike Wallace wrote, the “war over popular consciousness”. The 1980s was a time of reexamining the idea of the melting pot. August C. Bolino, author of the *Ellis Island Sourcebook* (1985), called Ellis Island an “integral part of the new trend” toward ethnic awareness.³³ Commemoration was taken to an all-new level for the Statue of Liberty’s centennial. The four-day extravaganza, dubbed Liberty Weekend, was anticipated by the *New York Times* to be the “perfect American celebration.”³⁴

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum tells the story of life after Ellis Island. The focal point of Chapter Three, the museum is a preserved tenement comprised of period apartments, which are accompanied by research that illuminates the lives of the immigrant families who resided there. The museum strives to promote greater social tolerance with its historical perspective. It actively connects the travails and triumphs of immigrants in history to those conditions faced by immigrants today, provoking thought about the past and teaching applicable contemporary lessons. Compared to Colonial Williamsburg, about which much has been written and whose focus is on rural living history, the Tenement Museum portrays the honest, gritty details of life on the urban frontier. By examining the mission and the design of the Tenement Museum, this chapter explores the making of one of the nation’s latest shrines to the immigrant story. Previous scholarship has recognized the creation of the museum as a milestone in American history museums, but there has not been an extensive analysis of the context of its environment. A hundred years previous, immigrant newcomers were entering a city in which the

³³ August C. Bolino, *The Ellis Island Source Book* (Washington, D.C.: Kensington Historical Press, 1985), 151.

³⁴ *NYT*

keyword to their success was assimilation. In the early 20th century, native-born Americans, such as the curators of the Museum of the City of New York, strove to present a collective tradition of American history, selectively assembled for an immigrant audience to learn and adapt to American life.³⁵ These New Yorkers did not foresee that in a few decades, those immigrants and their native heritages would be the ones remembered and cherished as American history.

Historiography

The research and writing process for this thesis has been somewhat different from that of the typical history thesis, because of the recent nature of the events under question. My chapters cover events, which span the past thirty years and have not been subjected to extensive study. As a result, a journalistic narrative emerges from my historic analysis, to provide a better picture of the local and national scene. This paper's extensive reliance on archival materials and library collections ultimately signal its historical grasp.

Research for these three places of memory took me to Jersey City and Trenton, to Ellis Island and the Lower East Side. The New Jersey Room at the Jersey City Public Library provided me with a sense of Jersey City history and many newspaper clippings regarding the creation of Liberty State Park and the American Bicentennial and Liberty Centennial celebrations. This work also benefited from the library's folders pertaining to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty – landmarks for which Jersey City very much still claims ownership. A relatively new addition to the library's holdings, the Audrey Zapp Papers, gave me material to work with regarding all of the above topics.

³⁵ See Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Traveling an hour south on the Turnpike, I spent time in the capital's New Jersey State Archives. There, within the stacks of boxes of the Office of the Governor lay the boxes of the Office of Ethnic Affairs, 1979-1992. These archival holdings illuminated the workings of the Liberty Park Multi-Ethnic Festival, as well as the greater mechanisms behind the Office of Ethnic Affairs itself. Crossing the bay water by ferry, I landed in the National Park Service archives at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. There, press and media coverage of Liberty Weekend painted a broader picture of the happenings. Finally, I had the opportunity to explore the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's institutional archives, which gave me a sense of the museum's early development and what it offered to the public, and the press coverage it received.

A considerable amount of secondary sources, published in the midst of the events under examination, provide a sense of what was happening at the time. On the other hand, the authors of sources published relatively recently are more reflective in their analyses, allowed with the passage of time. Both types of sources have proved useful in my research of ethnicity and public memory. The three presented below played an invaluable role in shaping the context and the methodological approach I adopted. They provided a background, a starting place, in which my own topics took root and expanded into new contexts.

In 1991, Michael Kammen published *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. As Kammen wrote in his introduction, for over a decade (at publication time) "the connection between collective memory and national identity ha[d] been a matter of intense and widespread interest."³⁶ Kammen provided a fascinating review of the role of collective memory throughout American history. Public memory, he wrote, "contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions" and "shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity,"

³⁶ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 3.

testifying to the importance of the field.³⁷ His fourth section, Circa 1945 to 1990, delved into a plethora of examples of historic preservation efforts, including, the debate between preservation and reconstruction, and the undeniable influence of Cold War politics on presenting American history. Kammen also discussed the rise of patriotism and American identity. I found the book's success to be in the author's bold leaps across a spectrum of leads, which worked together to produce this transitory picture of the efforts of commemoration, from Plymouth Plantation to the Civil War centennial. The author was not afraid to move discussions into the interdisciplinary realm, citing significant works in the arts that spoke to the time period and the national mindset. Kammen could not provide historical analysis for the more recent events of which he writes, and only mentioned in passing the Statue of Liberty's centennial and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. This thesis attempts to pick up where he left off, applying a rigorous examination of these events.

In 2006, Matthew Frye Jacobson made a significant contribution to the study of the white ethnic revival when he published *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*. This comprehensive analysis examined the racial constructions inherent in the white ethnic revival, as a response to the Civil Rights movement and, as the title denotes, Alex Haley's *Roots* phenomenon. Jacobson dedicated a small section to the Statue of Liberty's own revival, which he credited to the movement on the whole, beginning in the 1960s when attention turned to the demise of the newly-appointed national icon. Jacobson's book – a study of what happens when politics and popular culture collide in efforts to create answers to the changing times – provided a model to follow.

Thirdly, a secondary source I highly valued for the author's methodology and organization of his material was Max Page's *Creative Destruction of Manhattan 1900-1940*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

(1990) documented the building of Manhattan through its reconstructive planning in the early 20th century. The book aimed to “link the histories of various city building efforts (told separately) by showing how the politics of place pervaded and shaped these efforts,” wrote Page.³⁸ The author accomplished this through documenting, in context, the separate histories of city building efforts, including the development of Fifth Avenue, slum clearance, the preservation of City Hall, and the birth of the City Museum of New York. The chapter detailing the museum’s development provided an interesting point of comparison in developing my Chapter Three, on creation and importance of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. When juxtaposed, the former (granted a charter in 1923) and the latter (1988) demonstrate the vast change in focus of museums of the city striving to present a collective history.

It is Page’s multi-event approach that I used for my own purposes in looking at the bigger picture of immigration and ethnicity in local and national memory. Though they are comprised of separate events, spanning the decade of the 1980s (including the late 1970s and early 1990s), my chapters provide an intimate, focused look on celebration and commemoration, and inevitably reveal the ties among one another. In the 1980s, America’s gateway attracted a variety of visions of American history, which became relevant in interpreting the current events of the day.

³⁸ Page, *Creative Destruction of Manhattan*, 11.

– CHAPTER ONE –

Creating a ‘State of Nations’: New Jersey and the Late 20th -Century Ethnic Revival

“The New Jersey experience has indeed been a richly varied ethnic experience.”
— Barbara Cunningham, *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience* (1977)³⁹

At the end of the 1970s, many were questioning what would be the long term impact of the “ethnic resurgence” of the last decade and a half. Evidence suggested that it was fading; historian John Higham observed a cooling of the “the passions of hyperethnicity” and even a “renewed appreciation of assimilation as a powerful and socially desirable force.”⁴⁰ Others maintained that ethnicity remained a strong factor in American life, but in a less dramatic form. David Colburn and George Pozzetta, editors of *America and the New Ethnicity* (1979), surmised that it seemed “like ethnicity is here to stay; perhaps in a somewhat less emotional, less public stance, but present nonetheless.” No conclusions could be drawn as to the impact of the future, but optimistic visions foresaw a nation that could “more fully benefit from the diversity of human value and lifestyles” present in the nation. Ethnic groups had become “more confident in their place in American society” and “willing to define for themselves and the rest of the nation the precise role that they will play in this country’s future.”⁴¹ This chapter illustrates the governmental recognition given to the ethnic identity of the people of the state of New Jersey, and the state’s attempts to capitalize on that new identity through urban renewal, historic preservation, and celebration.

³⁹ Barbara Cunningham, ed., *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, (Union City, N.J.: Wm. H. Wise & Co, 1977).

⁴⁰ John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America*, Revised ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), xii.

⁴¹ David R. Colburn and George E. Pozzetta, eds., *America and the New Ethnicity* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979), 10-11.

American society in the 1970s experienced a shift from the ideology of liberal universalism and the desire for integration, to juggling the assertive forces of cultural nationalism. From the Second World War to the 1970s, liberal universalism – “belief in the fundamental unity and sameness of humanity” – was a guiding principle for integration in the south and for the rights movement on the whole. Northern liberals, intellectuals and Martin Luther King Jr. all espoused the idea. The outburst of Black Power and, consequently, ethnic revivalism produced the ubiquitous desire to preserve and express distinctive racial and ethnic cultures.⁴² Stokely Carmichael laid claim that integration promoted the idea that white is inherently better and black, inferior. Other ethnic groups responded in the fashion of the Committee for the Defense of the Polish Name, which recognized that Polish-Americans needed “an effective process of conscious-raising.” Others were more abrasive in their separatism, such as when shouts of “Italian Power” resounded and lapels saying ‘Kiss me I’m Italian’ abounded at a Columbus Circle rally in 1970.⁴³

The question arose, then, as historian Bruce Schulman asks, “Could America successfully combine several different types of cultural nationalism? Could Americans acknowledge difference and still share the same city, the same university, the same polity?”⁴⁴ This chapter will examine a localized state attempt to manage those questions. In New Jersey, government officials and ethnic group leaders wove together a pluralist narrative of New Jersey history, one which gave a place to these ethnic groups in society. Their differences were not viewed

⁴² Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift In American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 67.

⁴³ David R. Colburn and George E. Pozzetta, “Race, Ethnicity, and the Evolution of Political Legitimacy,” in *The Sixties: From History to Memory*, ed. David Farber, 119-120 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 68.

negatively, especially by policymakers, who may have viewed these “unlike, un-assimilable groups” as a “good to be valued – not a problem but a promise.”⁴⁵

Why New Jersey? Though not always recognized, it had always been a part of the gateway, receiving many of the immigrants coming to the nation from the earliest stages of immigration. Moreover, the state was uniquely affected by Johnson’s 1965 immigration legislation, which lifted the restrictions that had limited immigration for decades. Through the eighties, New Jersey’s immigrant population became more diverse, while the distribution of the foreign born in other high-immigration states grew more concentrated around one or two nationalities. From 1980 to 1990, New Jersey’s 56.7 percent European immigrant population dropped to 38.4 percent (the nation went from 39.2 percent 23.6 percent). Conversely, New Jersey’s Latin American immigrant population went from 25.7 percent to 33.3 percent and the number of Asian immigrants increased from 13.4 percent to 23.6 percent (nationally, the figures rose from 33.2 percent to 44.1 percent and 19.5 percent to 26.0 percent, respectively).⁴⁶ New Jersey’s above-average number of European groups dropped, while its Latin American and Asian populations increased.

Faced with these changing demographics, in addition to the atmosphere of heightened self-awareness, ethnic communities found themselves needing an outlet to preserve their identities and plant their roots in the Garden State. One such outlet was provided through the state-sponsored Liberty Park Ethnic Festival. For these specific groups, such ethnic festivals

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁶ Bruce Western and Erin Kelly, “Comparing Demographic and Labor-Market Characteristics of New Jersey and U.S. Foreign Born” in *Keys to Successful Immigration: Implications of the New Jersey Experience*, ed. Thomas J. Espenshade, 4, 36-37 (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1997). The bill had great affect on the nation’s overall immigration numbers. From 1931 to 1965, about 150,000 legal immigrants were entering the nation annually; totaling about 5 million in thirty-four years. After 1965, the numbers grew significantly, to 4.5 million during the 1970s, to 7.3 million during the 1980s, and to 9.1 million during the 1990s. This immigrant flood was concentrated mostly in a few states, including California, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, Illinois, and New York. James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 293.

served as “a reminder of ethnic heritage,” but also as “a bulwark against homogenization and against a loss of ethnical vision that could maintain unity,” as Suzanne Sinke has written. Sinke, who studied a Dutch-American tulip festival in Michigan, observed that these festivals became part of popular culture among all people, including those of differing origins, as “a celebration of American pluralism.”⁴⁷ She viewed the festival as a cultural performance, with a focus on the display of community values and social structure. These social gatherings may also create a “sense of community identity based on shared experience.”⁴⁸ The festival at Liberty State Park provided a destination for both local and regional visitors to sample the native land experience. The park itself offered a point of return for these descendants of immigrants. It was not quite the Africa of Alex Haley’s *Roots*, but it was the next best thing New Jersey had to offer.

In New Jersey, the ethnic revival was showing little signs of wane. There was no looking *beyond* the ideas of cultural pluralism. Rather, the state’s newly crafted storyline became, in all senses, a history of ethnic identity. It followed Horace Kallen’s vision of cultural pluralism, which he defined in 1915, as a democracy involving “not the elimination of differences but the perfection and conservation of differences.” His idea, however, assumed a basic equality among groups, and critics will contend that pluralist visions have not addressed the problem of inequality. Rather, in the words of Stephen Steinburg, “the hopes of the ethnic pluralists depend not just on a preservation of ethnic traditions, but also on a preservation of the class cleavages that have reinforced ethnic boundaries.”⁴⁹ The state attempted to bypass the issue of class by an equal presentation of its diverse communities in a festival landscape.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Sinke, “Analysis of a Dutch-American Festival,” in *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society – “Melting Pot” or “Salad Bowl”?*, ed. Michael D’Innocenzo and Josef P. Sirefman, 4 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992).

⁴⁸ Sinkew, “Analysis of a Dutch-American Festival,” 11.

⁴⁹ Stephen Steinburg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 261.

There had been a sudden increase in all things ethnic in the 1960s, however, the term “revival” seems to indicate that at once point these things had been lost, Matthew Frye Jacobson notes. The historian considers the term ethnic “reverie” more apt in describing the post-civil rights roots-searching phenomenon.⁵⁰ As it will be seen in Jersey City, ethnic community lines had long been delineated. Local residents had stayed close to their roots, living in their ethnic enclaves and sharing traditions from the old world. Once the nation caught up in celebrating these ethnicities, groups had stages on which to perform. Such a stage was set at the Liberty Park Festival.

This chapter’s central location is the waterfront of Jersey City, a blighted urban landscape to which no one paid attention until the view from Liberty Island prompted one local to notice it. The land became a state park, dedicated to the nation in honor of its bicentennial, and later hosted New Jersey’s first attempt at creating a “multi-ethnic” event. The Liberty Park Festival, as it was known in 1979, was the product of the governor’s first Ethnic Advisory Council. This is where the chapter shifts its focus to Trenton, to address the need for an organizing force to administer to the state’s multitude of “ethnic” communities. Through the 1980s, the term “ethnic” was meant to be all-inclusive. The broad scope of Chapter One demonstrates the wide-ranging affects of the ethnic revival as it pertained to social and political circumstances of New Jersey. Before any analysis of politics on the state level, ethnicity on the local level must be examined.

The Making of Liberty State Park

President Johnson’s 1965 proclamation attaching Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty gave Jersey City some sorely-needed national attention. The city on the west bank of the

⁵⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

Hudson, opposite Manhattan, was an abandoned shell of the bustling hub of transportation and manufacturing it had once been. In its past life it had also served as the stepping stone for immigrants entering the country through Ellis Island. At the height of the immigration flood at the turn of the twentieth century, 3,000 to 5,000 immigrants were passing through Ellis Island each day. Two-thirds of those newcomers – 9 to 12 million immigrants – took the ferry to Jersey City. There, they either boarded trains at the New Jersey Central Railroad Terminal or took a ferry to New York. The brick-red terminal, done in an eclectic Victorian era-style, had opened in 1889. Between 1890 and 1915, an estimated 9 to 12 million immigrants processed on Ellis Island entered the country by means of the Central Railroad Terminal.⁵¹ Even with the drop in immigration after the United States adopted a new restrictive policy in 1924, the train terminal remained popular, reaching its peak of 21 million passengers in 1929. The New Jersey-New York connection became even more direct in 1927, with the opening of the first tunnel beneath the bay. Governors Al Smith and A. Harry Moore met midway through the Holland Tunnel for its opening ribbon cutting ceremony. The construction of the tunnel had called for the demolition of the tenements referred to as “Cork Row,” at one time the home of Jersey City Mayors Hague and Kenny.⁵² Years later, Kenny, waxing romantically of his enclave, called it “a street that was

⁵¹ The Works Progress Administration assessed in 1939, “Millions of people carelessly regard Jersey City as a necessary rail and motor approach to Manhattan.” At one time a Dutch outpost, the City of Jersey was incorporated in 1820. In the nineteenth century, the city was a travel hub, the starting point for the New Jersey railroad, as well as the Paterson and Hudson rail lines. The Morris Canal, the 101-mile engineering marvel, also ended its route in the city. Indeed, travel was a major amenity the city had to offer. Among those travelers, however, were also the nation’s newest arrivals. Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of New Jersey, “New Jersey: A Guide To Its Present And Past,” (1939); and John W. Barber and Henry Howe, “Jersey City,” (New York: S. Tuttle, 1844), Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey, <http://history.rays-place.com/nj/jersey-city-nj.htm> (accessed October 5, 2007).

⁵² J. Owen Grundy, *The History of Jersey City [1609-1976]* (Jersey City: Walter E. Knight, 1976), 54.

daring and reckless and sometimes melancholy and sleepy by for the most part blithe and merry.”⁵³

For the most part of the century, politics were synonymous with corruption in Jersey City and Hudson County. Citizens lived under the firm rule of an Irish-led political machine, first under Frank Hague and then John V. Kenny. The support base of the Hague machine lay in the immigrant enclaves. Kenny, formerly with Hague, gained power in 1949. It wasn't until 1960, with political restructuring, that city residents were able to directly vote for their mayor.⁵⁴

The ethnic character of the area aided the perpetration of the political machine. In 1900, of the 386,048 residents of the county, 264,346 were natives, and 121,702 were foreign born. By 1940 the population had almost doubled (totaling 652,040), yet those reported as foreign born was 138,167. (Blacks made up 2.4 percent of the population, the Irish were 2 percent, Polish 2.5 percent, and Italian 5.7 percent.) In 1960, Hudson County's total population was recorded at 610,734, with those of foreign stock numbering 275,241 (Irish 4.6 percent; Polish 5.9 percent; Italian 13.6 percent; Black 6.7 percent).⁵⁵

By 1970, the census revealed a jump in residents' ethnic identification, as 31 percent of Jersey residents listed themselves of “foreign white stock.” Thirty-one percent identified themselves as Italian, 14 percent Polish, and 12 percent Irish. The census also revealed two rapidly growing communities: the population of African Americans had grown to 21 percent, and

⁵³ John V. Kenny, “Cork Row, A Bit of Heaven in Downtown Jersey City That Is No More, Recalled by Its Greatest Living Alumnus,” *Jersey Journal*, (n.d.). The New Jersey Room Collection, Jersey City Public Library, Jersey City, N.J. (hereafter cited as NJR).

⁵⁴ Grundy, *History of Jersey City*, 62.

⁵⁵ Of those recorded as foreign-born, 121,295 were “white foreign born” men and women. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900, 1940, and 1960, in *Historical Census Browser* (University of Virginia), <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (accessed October 3, 2007). Joseph A. Varacalli, a Jersey City native who has studied ethnicity in society, marked this time period as a turning point for white, Catholic ethnic relations in politics. He saw a decline in the importance of a “nationality-centered ethnicity” among Catholic ethnic groups, countered by the emergence of a “more inclusive ‘white, working-class, Catholic’ ethnic identity.” Joseph A. Varacalli, “Ethnic Politics in Jersey City,” (Address, 16th Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association, State University of New York at Albany, November 11-12, 1983.) File: Jersey City Politics, NJR.

9 percent of residents in the census held a Spanish surname.⁵⁶ A combination of industry shrinkage, the flight of middle-class residents to the suburbs and an influx of low-income residents brought hard times upon the city. The railroads had once provided the city with one-third of the revenue needed to provide city services; now their taxes only contributed 14 percent. Race rioting took hold of Jersey City as it had seized the nation. A series of race riots erupted in September 1964, with one Sunday night drawing out over 800 black Americans, demanding better jobs, housing and education.⁵⁷ Through the 1970s, the city's population continued to drop, from more than 260,000 to less than 224,000.⁵⁸

This urban crisis was demonstrated best by the dismal situation of community relations in Newark, a city adjacent to Jersey City and site of considerable rioting in the 1960s. In an address to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Monsignor Geno Baroni stressed, "We could not understand the urban crisis unless we understood the ethnic and class factor in urban American life." Baroni, an inner city priest and social activist in 1960s, was an advocate of poor and working-class Italian, Polish, and Irish Americans, as well as other white ethnics, and who received a grant from the Ford Foundation to establish the Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs. Newark illustrated "the dynamics of deterioration of northern urban cities," because of the uncertain relationship between the growing black and Hispanic populations and the whites.⁵⁹ He urged the development of an "urban policy that legitimizes ethnic, racial and cultural pluralism and includes the revitalization of the parish neighborhood as an essential building block for

⁵⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 Census of Population and Housing: Census Tracts: Jersey City Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), as cited in Stephen R. Weissman, "White Ethnics & Urban Politics in the Seventies," *Polity*. 9:2 (Winter 1976): n189. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3234394> (accessed December 1, 2007).

⁵⁷ "New Racial Riot Hits Jersey City as Parley Fails," *NYT*, August 4, 1964.

⁵⁸ Daniel Akst, "JC Betting On the Future," *NYT*, April 12, 1981.

⁵⁹ Geno Baroni, "Ethnicity and Race," (Address to National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bicentennial Committee, Newark, N.J., 1975), in *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor, 825 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

renewing cities.” Acknowledgement of the diverse social character of American cities was vital for the future of cities. “Intercultural pluralism must be a dimension of this new urban social policy,” he stated. It must include “the genius of the American ethnic, racial and cultural experience.”⁶⁰

The fight for the renewal of the Jersey City shoreline began in 1958 with resident Morris Pesin. Pesin, a local clothing manufacturer, would lead the citizen advocacy efforts on behalf of Liberty Park. He first brought the waterfront’s blighted conditions to public attention in 1958. A long, traffic-congested family trip to New York City to take the ferry to the Statue of Liberty had left him distraught that there was no direct route to the national monument from Jersey City. He set out to prove the close proximity of Liberty Island to the city by making the trip in a rowboat. He brought with him a *Jersey Journal* reporter and made the trip in eight minutes. The view from the island showed “a decayed and dismal looking urban waterfront.” Pesin saw the abandoned Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal and its “dilapidated railway cars, rusting tracks and rotting docks.”⁶¹ Where there was decay, Pesin saw promise.

Speaking before the Jersey City Commission, Pesin championed the creation of a “Liberty Park,” with great benefit to the city, as well. He spoke of Virginia’s Monticello and Williamsburg, of Massachusetts’ Plymouth Rock, and of Washington D.C.’s Mt. Vernon, and said, “With proper planning and vision we can utilize this monumental symbol of freedom to make Jersey City take its rightful place among America’s great historical cities.” The city would become a “stopping place” instead of a “going through” place. His plans included a causeway connecting the statue to the mainland, the establishment of a park, along with a potential museum displaying the contributions of immigrants of all nationalities and possibly “a religious

⁶⁰ Baroni, “Ethnicity and Race,” 829.

⁶¹ Michelle I. Galler, “From Old Rail Yard to New City Park,” *Smithsonian* 9:7 (October 1978): 150-152.

shrine as a symbol of our religious freedom.”⁶² Despite his efforts, little action was taken to improve the conditions. Another trip, in 1961, the year of the statue’s 75th anniversary, would prompt more public attention, and yield state plans for a park on the waterfront the following year.⁶³

A visit by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall signaled the federal government’s attention to the area. Udall came to Jersey City on October 21, 1964, announcing that the president would soon be making his proclamation about Ellis Island’s historic status and also recognizing New Jersey’s part in the restoration. Pesin later credited Congressman Neil Gallagher for urging the secretary over the years to visit Jersey City.⁶⁴ Gallagher himself was a Democrat of Irish heritage, who had grown up in the adjoining city, Bayonne. His rise to political power had been credited to the Kenny machine, and he had been mentioned as a possible Democratic running mate for Johnson and a potential governor of New Jersey.⁶⁵

Jersey City envisioned Liberty State Park to be its own Central Park, with the added benefits of the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty. This was the state’s opportunity to extend its reach over the American torch-holding symbol. Park progress, however, was slow. The state struggled under the financial restrictions of its Green Acres program. By 1971, there still had been no development of the site for recreation purposes.⁶⁶ Three years later, the state was finally able to secure a \$3 million Green Acres bond that had been approved by voters in the November 1974 election.⁶⁷

⁶² Morris Pesin, “Remarks of Morris Pesin Before Jersey City Commission Meeting,” June 17, 1958. Friends of Liberty State Park, <http://www.folsp.org/Pesin's%20first%20speech.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2007).

⁶³ “7 Years Ago: Canoe Trip that Sparked Drive for Link to Lady Liberty,” *Jersey Journal*, June 10, 1965. File: Statue of Liberty Pre-1980, NJR.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ John T. McQuiston, “Gallagher a Product of Kenny’s Machine,” *NYT*, June 16, 1973.

⁶⁶ Alan L. Canter, “Letter to the Editor, Gateway: Park for the People,” *NYT*, July 21, 1971.

⁶⁷ “Liberty State Park to Get \$3 Million,” *Jersey Journal*, November 12, 1974. File: Statue of Liberty, Pre-1980, NJR.

This potential for redevelopment in the 1970s, perhaps a remnant of the Great Society's turn to the city, offered a glimmer of optimism for the people of the troubled city. City historian J. Owen Grundy marks this with the 1971 mayoral election of Dr. Paul T. Jordon, one of the founding members of the reform-minded Community Action Council. Liberty Park and the harbor were being developed, along with Jersey City's other waterfront areas. Streets were widened and buildings constructed along Exchange Place; blocks of sub-standard buildings were razed, and brownstones restored. Concluding his 367-year history of Jersey City up until 1976 (it had been written in honor of the nation's bicentennial), Grundy speaks of revival: the sprouting of neighborhood associations; the designation of historic sites by the City Bicentennial Commission; landmark and house "tours" conducted. There was a noticeable change in the "atmosphere" and "climate" in City Hall, with the introduction of new residents, "taking an active interest and becoming increasingly involve in the city's civic and cultural life." There was "a definite resurgence of interested in the city's history and mounting civic pride."⁶⁸ That pride came to be expressed in relation to the history of the city, in its part of the commemoration of the nation's bicentennial year of the American Revolution.

An American Bicentennial with an Ethnic Twist

In preparing for the bicentennial celebrations, Governor Brendan Byrne listed the Jersey Central Railroad Terminal on the State Register of Historical Places, in addition to nominating it for the National Register of Historic Places. It was one of many designations Byrne and the state bicentennial committee were making to bring public attention to the state's lesser-known historic sites.⁶⁹ The terminal, in the land now being developed as Liberty State Park, had been left to

⁶⁸ Grundy, *History of Jersey City*, 65-66.

⁶⁹ "Jersey City Rail Depot Designated As Historic Site," *NYT*, October 12, 1975.

deteriorate after the railroad company filed for bankruptcy in 1967. The Depression and the Second World War, in addition to changing technologies in transportation, had taken their toll on the railroad service.⁷⁰ A listing on the state register protected a landmark from any negative effects of proposed government projects. The National Register made properties eligible for restoration and preservation grants from the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior. Byrne saw the terminal exemplify “several facets of New Jersey’s heritage,” representing industrial development and “the great immigrant era.” It was also a standing tribute to the work of 19th-century architects, engineers and construction trades. New Jersey was already known for its place in Revolutionary history. Take, for example, the Battlegrounds of Trenton and the famous “Washington Crossing the Delaware,” situated off Jersey land.⁷¹ In Jersey City, there was the Apple-Tree House in the Heights neighborhood, where Generals Washington and Lafayette had dined during the revolution.⁷²

This juxtaposition of early American history and local ethnic history was a common theme of bicentennial celebration nationwide. This period, writes Jacobson, was a time where heritage came to be an idiom for American nationalism.⁷³ The nation’s extended Fourth of July weekend, including a formal Bicentennial address at Independence Hall and a sailing parade in New York Harbor, involved President Gerald Ford speaking at a naturalization ceremony at Monticello, Virginia. The president’s remarks drew upon the Black Power movement of the previous decade, citing the motto “Black is beautiful,” as an effective engine to examine the

⁷⁰ Carmela Karnoutsos, “Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal, Liberty State Park,” in *Jersey City Past and Present*, New Jersey City University, http://www.njcu.edu/Programs/jchistory/Pages/C_Pages/Central_Railroad_of_New_Jersey.html/ (accessed October 10, 2007).; and “Liberty State Park: CRRNJ,” N.J. Department of Environmental Protection, http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/liberty_state_park/liberty_crrnj.html (accessed October 10, 2008).

⁷¹ “Jersey City Rail Depot Designated Historic Site,” *NYT*, October 12, 1975.

⁷² W. Jay Mills, *Historic Houses of New Jersey* (1902; repr., Morristown, N.J.: Digital Antiquaria, 2004). This book, which documents the history of the Apple Tree House and other sites in the north Jersey area, signals the beginning of the preservation movement in early 20th-century New Jersey.

⁷³ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 56.

beauty inherent in brown, white, red and yellow. His praise for diversity came heavily wrapped in Cold War rhetoric. “The wealth we have of culture, ethnic and religious and racial traditions are valuable counterbalances to the overpowering sameness and subordination of totalitarian societies,” Ford said, commending the nation. Americans should pride themselves in the “heritage of the past,” which is “rooted now, not in England alone ... not in Europe alone, or in Africa alone or Asia, or on the islands of the sea.”⁷⁴

Jersey City’s own bicentennial commission sponsored many events that focused on both Revolutionary and ethnic history. Participation in bicentennial planning and events was meant to instill pride in the city’s citizens.⁷⁵ In the city’s downtown district, a citizen militia staged a reenactment of the Battle of Paulus Hook.⁷⁶ The Ethnic Heritage Festival, presented by the Ethnic Studies Program of Jersey City State College and the Hudson County Commission, featured the performances of fifteen dance groups.⁷⁷ The commemorative bicentennial medallions offered by the city’s commission (chaired by Pesin, who was now a councilman) were perhaps most illustrative of the celebratory spirit of the city. The front of the medal featured Lady Liberty, with stars and rays of light emanating from her torch and Jersey City in the background. The inscription on the back of the medal read: “Jersey City, the city nearest the Statue of Liberty and the site of the Battle of Paulus Hook of the Revolutionary War.” Conversely, the national medal issued by the U.S. Mint, posed the Statue on its front, with the

⁷⁴ Gerald Ford, “Remarks at Naturalization Ceremonies at Monticello, Virginia,” July 5, 1976, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6187> (accessed December 8, 2007). See also “Bicentennial Celebration,” CQ Electronic Library, CQ Historic Documents Series Online Edition, hsd76-0001231844. Originally published in *Historic Documents of 1976* (Washington: CQ Press, 1977). <http://library.cqpress.com/historicdocuments/hsd76-0001231844> (accessed October 16, 2007).

⁷⁵ “City Bicentennial Medallion Sells At A Fast Pace,” *Jersey Journal*, March 22, 1976. File: Bicentennial Celebration, NJR.

⁷⁶ David Grossman, “Paulus Hook Will See British Lose Again,” *Jersey Journal*, April 24, 1975. File: Bicentennial Celebration, NJR.

⁷⁷ “Ethnic Heritage Dance Festival,” Newsclipping, n.d. File: Bicentennial Celebration, NJR.

Great Seal of the United States on its back.⁷⁸ In two months, nearly 3,000 bronze Jersey City medallions, at \$3 each, had been sold. They were also offered in gold and silver.⁷⁹

The 35 finished acres of Liberty State Park, as well as the innovation of its design, were presented to the public as a bicentennial gift to the nation. During the Flag Day dedication ceremony, Governor Byrne's remarks observed the position of the park in the historic gateway narrative. "On the historic occasion of the anniversary of our nationhood, it is fitting that we return to the threshold of our immigration and dedicate this new facility," Byrne recited. "It is the appropriate background of our country's most revered monuments: Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty." Thirteen American flags, each 10 by 15 feet, were simultaneously raised by Jersey City Girl and Boy Scouts, as the Army Band played "The Star-Spangled Banner."⁸⁰ Just two years later, the park was accommodating more than 700,000 visitors a year.⁸¹ The publicly-acclaimed waterfront park plans went on exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1979. Chief designer Robert Geddes described the public urban landscape as a combination of architectural form, social content and natural environment. For *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, the plans represented "a new kind of park, which strives not only for pastoral beauty and waterfront pleasures, but for a balance of environmental, ecological, recreational and cultural concerns." It would become more than just "another surreal New Jersey landscape of sea grass, weeds and trash."⁸²

The bicentennial book *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience* (1977) was something of a tribute to the Garden State as a pluralistic Eden, establishing itself as a model for the nation.

⁷⁸ "For Bicentennial Liberty on City's Medal," *Jersey Journal*, n.d. File: Bicentennial Celebration, NJR.

⁷⁹ The Jersey City celebrations present an example of the overall decentralized design of the bicentennial commemoration. Michael Kammen noted that the celebration of the bicentennial, as had occurred with the Civil War Centennial, was decentralized by design, successfully celebrated on the local and regional levels, more so than on the national level. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 572.

⁸⁰ Joan Cook, "Byrne Dedicates a Park Close to Statue of Liberty," *NYT*, June 15, 1976.

⁸¹ Galler, "From Old Rail Yard to New City Park."

⁸² Ada Louise Huxtable, "Liberty Park – First of a New Breed," *NYT*, November 4, 1979.

Barbara Cunningham, the book's editor, endeavored "to present New Jersey as a case study of the American ethnic experience." She called the state a "microcosm of the country," with its industrial cities in the northeast and rural and suburban areas throughout the rest.⁸³ The book, financed through a \$20,000 grant from the national bicentennial administration, was divided into 31 essays, each one chronicling the story of a different ethnic group. It built upon Rudolph J. Vecoli's *The People of New Jersey* (1965), which had studied the different ethnic groups from colonial times to the present (focusing on Italians and East European Jews in the twentieth century).⁸⁴ Vecoli was a historian in his own right, and in time would become president of the Immigration History Society. Conversely, the writers within the *Ethnic Experience* collection were mostly nonprofessionals, who used personal and community resources to tell the stories of their own cultures in a New Jersey context. It was an important development for ethnic observance, for some of the groups featured had never been documented, while others hoped to achieve a better level of understanding in the public eye.⁸⁵ The book was "a form of celebration," meant to encourage others to delve into the state's many heritages.⁸⁶

The book was also representative of a new branch of literature, which addressed issues that included two or more ethnic groups. Up until this time, there had been little compiled on the ethnic history of states. In addition to Vecoli's *New Jersey* book, *Restless Strangers* (1970) had covered the state of Nevada's immigrant populations. Other authors sought to capture the ethnic compositions of cities.⁸⁷ The chairman of the commission, former Governor Robert B. Meyner,

⁸³ Rosemary Lopez, "25 Ethnic Groups United for a Book," *NYT*, November 28, 1976.

⁸⁴ John A. Munroe, Book Review, *The People of New Jersey* by Rudolph J. Vecoli (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1965), *Journal of American History* 58:1 (June 1971): 195-196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1890149> (accessed April 10, 2008).

⁸⁵ Rosemary Lopez, "25 Ethnic Groups United for a Book," *NYT*, November 28, 1976.

⁸⁶ Barbara Cunningham, ed. *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, (Union City, NJ: Wm. H. Wise & Co, 1977), 2.

⁸⁷ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "European Americans: from Immigrants to Ethnic," *The International Migration Review* 6:4 (Winter 1972): 429-430, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3002825> (accessed April 1, 2008). Consult Vecoli's article for a thorough listing of the ethnic literature available in the early 70s.

writing in the Forward, binds together the story of the revolution with that of the immigrants, writing, “What has been revolutionary about our society has been perhaps its ability to accept diverse groups.”⁸⁸ The collection received praise for the effort it represented; however, its inaccuracies were also noted.⁸⁹ For example, a Lithuanian journal published a review of the book’s 20-page essay “Lithuanians,” criticizing the presentation of Lithuanians “as if they were all Roman Catholics whose New Jersey experience was uninterruptedly placid.” Missing, in the eyes of this reviewer, were the socialists, freethinkers and religious controversy.⁹⁰

The New Jersey Ethnic Experience brought to the forefront the idea that the state was comprised of a multitude of different people, who had different livelihoods and needs. Its publishing was the beginning of the state’s greater efforts to facilitate a state environment that recognized the various groups within its society. More than a book would be needed to accommodate those communities.

The Governor’s Ethnic Advisory Council and Multi-Ethnic Festival

In 1978, Brendon Byrne was the Democratic incumbent running in an election in which the ethnic vote was considered key. Candidates in both the Democratic and Republic realm were wooing members of the state’s identifiable ethnic voting blocs. During his campaigning, Byrne

⁸⁸ Barbara Cunningham, *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, Preface.

⁸⁹ Ten years after the collection had been published the Ethnic Advisory Council (discussed later in this chapter) sought to produce a new book. The council recognized the flaws of the bicentennial edition: the ethnic it groups it had excluded, the irregularity of the writing, and its lack of academic depth. It recommended a professional editor be hired to oversee the inclusion of fifty or more ethnic communities. Accordingly, in September of 1988, Assemblyman Robert Singer introduced the “ethnic book” bill in the Assembly (A 3715), appropriating \$95,000 “for the preparation and publication of an ethnic history of New Jersey.” Senator Thomas Cowan had introduced a similar bill (S-2656) earlier. The Council even suggested a letter writing campaign to be undertaken by New Jersey’s ethnic communities. An updated version, however, never materialized. Juhan Simonson to Jane Burgio, Documentation of the ethnic history and contributions in New Jersey, October 6, 1986. Box 9, Office of the Governor, Office of Ethnic Affairs, Records 1978-1992, New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, N.J.; Bill No. A3715, New Jersey – History, Symbols, Holidays, Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs; and Juhan Simonson to Thomas Kometani, Introduction of ethnic book bill, September 19, 1988. Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

⁹⁰ William Wolkovich-Valkavicius, Book Review of *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience* ed. by Barbara Cunningham, *Lithuanus* 24:3 (Fall 1978). http://www.lituanus.org/1978/78_3_06.htm (accessed December 8, 2007).

formed “the ethnic coalition for Brendan Byrne,” which included representatives from a dozen ethnic communities. His opponent, Raymond Bateman, sought out the Polish-American vote by marching in New York City’s annual Pulaski Day parade. Somewhat ironically, eighteen years earlier, Bateman had written in the *New York Times Magazine*, warning of the ineffectuality of spending money to gain the ethnic vote. “This is the middle of the 20th century,” he wrote. “Appeal to voters as Americans.” At that time, however, many of the ethnic blocs whose ballots were at stake in 1978 were not even politically active. Now, some of the traditionally democratic-leaning groups, not satisfied with Byrne or the Democrats, were considering swinging the other way. The president of the Polish-American Congress had publicly criticized the governor for not following up on his 1973 campaign promises, which had included the appointment of several Polish-Americans as judges.⁹¹ Ethnic communities, empowered by the revival in the past decade, had needs and wants that required responses from their elected officials.

Courting voters by appealing to specific ethnic groups was nothing new to American politics, but the idea had gained speed in recent elections. It was especially familiar to the Jersey City residents who had lived under the Irish-dominated political machines for the first half of the century. Those citizens may have had little say to whom their vote went. The 1970s produced a new idea: that these voters had a *choice*. The prospects of the ethnic vote had received much attention in the 1972 presidential election, with magazines and newspapers devoting “many hundreds of thousands of column inches to analyses of the ‘ethnic vote.’”⁹²

⁹¹ Martin Waldron, “Ethnic Votes May Be Key to Election,” *NYT*, October 9, 1977.

⁹² Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 147.

Byrne himself was of Irish heritage, but not a career politician.⁹³ A journalist once described him as a cross between an Irish politician and a judge, a characterization with which Byrne agreed.⁹⁴ But the governor's lack of public personality – often mistaken for weakness – put him out of favor with his constituents. His public persona did not match up with his predecessors, Richard J. Hughes and William T. Cahill, who were both also Irish Catholic governors (a Democrat and Republican, respectively).⁹⁵ At the same time, however, Byrne appeared nonchalant about his low popularity ratings, which reached even new lows with the passage of his landmark income tax.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, Byrne was reelected, and in recognition of the state as one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse states in the nation, he created its first Ethnic Advisory Council in April 1978. His executive order maintained that the attention given to these groups would affirm the state's "unity within a framework of cultural diversity."⁹⁷ The council was made of 16 members who were appointed by the governor to serve two-year terms. The council acted as liaison to the ethnic communities of the state, and named the needs and goals of these groups. There was no official state agency designated to perform the work of the Council, so the Division of Travel and Tourism filled the role.⁹⁸ An assistant to the governor within the Travel and Tourism office, Stephen B. Richer became the Ethnic Community Liaison. His position

⁹³ Byrne's gubernatorial run in 1973 had been his first election.

⁹⁴ Ken Auletta, "'Who Am I? A Sometimes Misunderstood Guy'; It Has All Been Downhill for Brendan Byrne of New Jersey," *NYT*, June 8, 1975.

⁹⁵ "Byrne, Shy Yet Tough, Survived Loss of Popularity on Tax Issue," *NYT*, November 7, 1977.

⁹⁶ Barbara G. Salmore and Stephen A. Salmore, *New Jersey Politics and Government: Suburban Politics Comes of Age, Second Edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 133.

⁹⁷ Brendan Byrne, "Executive Order No. 65," Ethnic Advisory Council created, April 11, 1978, 980-982, Executive Orders 1-113 of Governor Brendan T. Byrne (1974-1981), *New Jersey Digital Legal Library*, Rutgers University, <http://njlegallib.rutgers.edu/eo/byrne.php> (accessed April 8, 2008). Before 1978, the state had supported its different ethnic groups through the New Jersey Bicentennial Ethnic Council, the re-opening of Ellis Island as a National Park and the beginning of the Liberty Park Complex, the Heritage Festivals held at the Garden State Arts Center, and the Inter-Cultural Relations and Ethnic Studies Institute in the Rutgers University Graduate Department of Education.

⁹⁸ Juhan Simonson to George Pappas, Comparison of Council under Byrne and Kean, May 2, 1988. Folder: Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

entailed sending memorandums to ethnic media outlets and broadcasting events, such as informing ethnic groups of a special feature broadcast during The “New Jersey Nightly News.” The station presented a month-long’s worth of 30-second station breaks featuring the various ethnic groups of New Jersey, as part of an on-going series of significant landmarks, institutions, and group contributions to the state.⁹⁹

The council’s proposal for a New Jersey Ethnic Center represented one of the state’s most ambitious efforts to advance its pluralistic model of society (Kallen’s “perfection and conservation” of differences). The ethnic center was to be a cultural institution, including museum and performing space, an information clearing house, restaurants and shopping areas, “to show case the cultural traditions of New Jersey’s diverse ethnic communities.” Plans for the center, however, came slowly. The state sought to capitalize on its “eighty-one distinct cultural traditions,” considering itself to be “perhaps the most culturally diverse state in the nation.” Its exhibits and events would attract both local and regional visitors and participants. One of the proposed locations for the Ethnic Center was Liberty State Park.¹⁰⁰ The Chairman of the Center described it to the ethnic communities of the state as a place to “furnish all of us with the facilities to realize our fondest hopes for our communities – a place to dance, to learn, to touch, and to see what it means to be part of a specific ethnic group.”¹⁰¹ Byrne’s ethnic advisors urged him to take action in moving forward with the site selection. A letter to the governor reminded him of his recent annual message to the legislature, in which he had stressed the “ideas for new or revived civic centers, museums, industrial parks, ethnic heritage exhibits, convention facilities, theatres, and other projects.” He had spoken with a sense of urgency: “If we move

⁹⁹ Stephen D. Richer to All Ethnic Communities, Channel 13 Station Breaks, July 1980. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁰⁰ Sandra E. Kelly to Council Members, Memorandum, March 23, 1981. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁰¹ Carl B.S. Pederson to All NJ Ethnic Communities, Formation of First Board of Directors, January 30, 1981. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

now, our side of the river with full development of Liberty State Park and other projects can look better than the New York side.¹⁰²

In 1979, the governor's Ethnic Advisory Council sponsored the state's first multi-ethnic festival held in Liberty State Park.¹⁰³ The festival's goals were two-fold, as described to Jersey City Mayor Thomas X.F. Smith by the festival coordinator, Barbara Taylor, the Ethnic Specialist for New Jersey: "To demonstrate the solidarity and strength of the ethnic communities of New Jersey," and "To generate publicity and support for facilities and services available at the park." Ethnic communities still maintained emotional ties the area, Taylor wrote. Furthermore, marketing Jersey City's ethnicity would put it on the map. "Just as Chinatown and Little Italy in New York City are the focus of tourist activity, the multi-various ethnic groups living and carrying out their traditions in Jersey City represent significant, as yet untapped economic and cultural resources."¹⁰⁴ By promoting its ethnic attractions, the park and the festival had the potential to enhance the city's image and increase tourism.

The Liberty Park Festival had the look and feel of the traditional ethnic festivals that had gained popularity in the past decade. Of all the ways Americans sought to express their identities during the roots movement of the decade, the festival was the most common romantic enactment.¹⁰⁵ This ethnic festival differed from other festivals, however, in its "multi-ethnic" scope and its state sponsorship. The festival debuted in September 1979. The weekend affair drew in about 10,000 visitors and featured 40 of the state's ethnic groups. Craft and food booths abounded, while performances filled the two-day, noon to dusk schedule.

¹⁰² Carl B.S. Pedersen to Brendan Byrne, Letter, February 13, 1981. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁰³ The ethnic council had been the primary sponsor of the Liberty Festival, contributing a grant of \$4,536.86, while the NJ Department of Environmental Protection also contributed \$2,923.00. In later years, in addition to the fall Liberty State Park Festival, the Office of Ethnic Affairs sponsored the official ethnic festival at Glassboro State College, held annually in the spring. Sandra E. Kelly to Ethnic Advisory Council, Memorandum, March 24, 1981. Folder: Correspondence March 1981, Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Taylor to Dick Bozzone, Initial Progress Report, July 20, 1979. Folder: Old Festival, Box 2, OEA.

¹⁰⁵ Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 92.

Fourteen years after President Johnson's promise of land rehabilitation, the public was finally able to enjoy this "bright chapter in American history." At the south end of the park, the Hungarian Dance Ensemble of New Brunswick performed in front of the American flags, which flapped against the strong winds of the day. Dancers and performers littered the festival's schedule of events, ranging from a soloist performing Irish and Scottish harp music, to the Portuguese Children's Folklore Group, to the traditional West African dance performed by the African-American Folklore and Historical Society. A New York architect painted and signed his traditional Chinese paintings, while a 15-year-old Armenian immigrant helped sell her family's *lahmajoun*, what she called an "Armenian pizza."¹⁰⁶ For \$1.50 a ride, the ferry boat "Miss Liberty" took festival-goers from the mainland over to Liberty and Ellis Islands to hear poetry read by immigrant authors or those of immigrant ancestry. On the boat ride they were treated to the performances of a four-piece jazz ensemble.¹⁰⁷ At the base of the Statue of Liberty, they heard immigrant poetry read aloud. One such poem was Patricia Hampl's "Wooden Steamer Case":

The trunk takes us back
(the dead and the rest of us)
to Ellis Island,
to the ocean which is gray
and three weeks long,
takes us to Hamburg, to a train,
to Prague; then in wooden shoes
to Kutná Hora where
we are born
into a European dream ...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Description of the festival compiled from a series of newspaper clippings, including: "Ethnic Festival Will Open Saturday at Liberty Park," *Jersey Journal*, September 9, 1980; Richard Goldensohn, "Ethnic festival proves a delight to the senses," *The Dispatch*, September 15, 1980. Folder: Ethnic Festival, Zapp Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Linda L. Federici to The Circle Line, Letter, August 20, 1980. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Hampl, "Wooden Steamer Case." Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs. Hampl was a former editor of *Lamp in the Spine* poetry magazine (St. Paul). Her friend, local poet Nicholas Kolumban, selected to read this poem of hers, among his others, on Ellis Island during the inaugural year of the Liberty Park Festival. Press Release, "Poets From Tri-State Area To Read Works At Liberty State Park and Ellis Island As Part of Statewide Ethnic Festival," 1979. Folder: Old Festival, Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs. Participating poets included Nicholas Kolumban of

Similar to the nostalgic imagery within Hampl's poetry, the landscape of the 1979 Liberty Park Festival was that of a dream of native lands. With an emphasis on returning to the innocence of the arrival of the original immigrants, the festival focused on ethnic contributions and celebration of the lives they had left behind in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

A state report following the festival would attribute some of the festival's success to its location, itself seeped in history. The Liberty Park Festival represented "the type of event that promotes appreciation for the distinct contributions of each group to the cultural traditions in New Jersey." The park's views of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island made the land "perhaps the most significant and appropriate site in the nation for any celebration of the diversity of national traditions." This "landmark destination" was the key "to understand and experience first hand the emigrant experience."¹⁰⁹ The event created memories in the place where history had once been eluded, attaching meaning to the site.

The festival was the state's first attempt to create a multi-ethnic event, and in following years, organizers extended special efforts to include all of the state's ethnic groups. As completed applications came in, the coordinators noted which ethnic groups would be present and which were still not represented. Wrote an assistant working for the center seeking help: "We are working very hard to try to contact all the ethnic communities."¹¹⁰ The idea of a variety of ethnicities and cultures represented at a festival was not a new one, nor was it limited to the East Coast. As part of the growing acknowledgement of the ethnic diversity in the West, in the

Somerville, NJ, a Hungarian immigrant; Siv Cederling Fox of upstate New York, a Swedish immigrant; Sandra Maria Esteves of New York City, a second-generation Latin American; Lila Zeuger of Great Neck, NY, an Austrian immigrant; and Rosemary Cappelo of Darby, PA, a second-generation Italian.

¹⁰⁹ "Ethnic Traditions and Festivals," report, n.d. Folder: Old Festival, Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹¹⁰ Those communities still sought for participation included: Cuban, Coast Rican, Colombian, Chilean, Argentinean, Honduran, Jamaican, El Salvadoran, Guyanese, Bolivian, Brazilian, Venezuelan, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Dominican, Haitian, Mexican, Macedonian, Nicaraguan, and Georgian. Sandra E. Kelly to Blanca N. Gonzalez-Restrepo, Seeking groups, March 17, 1981. Folder: Old Festival, Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

1950s the people of Montana participated in a Festival of Nations. More than 20 groups participated in the ethnic food, costumes and culture, as well as hour-long “nationality programs,” exhibit devoted to the “Old West – the pre-ethnic, pre-melting pot, American West.”¹¹¹

The restoration of the Central Railroad of New Jersey terminal, located in the park, provides the quintessential illustration of how the ethnic revival also affected urban revival and historic preservation. For many, the terminal’s renewal was to complete the trilogy of the New York Harbor immigrant narrative. Jersey City residents came out in scores to see the opening of the partially restored terminal in 1980, joining the estimated 18,000 festival participants the second year of the festival.¹¹² Despite objections of potential damage to the restorative work, booths selling ethnic crafts and food were set up in the terminal’s waiting room, which had been rebuilt and painted. Outside, though, the railroad tracks were still overgrown with weeds.¹¹³

The terminal represented New Jersey’s part in the nation’s history of immigration, for although the Statue of Liberty lay in New Jersey state waters, the actual monument and island were under the jurisdiction of New York State. This fact, however, did not prevent Margaret Jeffers, the city’s long-time tax assessor, from keeping the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island on the Jersey City tax rolls as tax-exempt properties.¹¹⁴ Upon signing the 1965 Immigration Bill, Johnson had good-naturedly challenged the congressmen from New York and New Jersey to a race to the top of the Statue of Liberty, to determine to whose state it belonged.¹¹⁵ At the festival, the Statue was also the setting for a performance from the musical *JERZ*, about the state’s history

¹¹¹ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 549.

¹¹² The 1981 Liberty Park Festival Steering Committee, Meeting Minutes, April 21, 1981. Folder: Correspondence April 1981, Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹¹³ Ted Sherman, “New Citizens Take Oath Alongside Ethnic Celebration at Liberty Park,” *Star-Ledger*, September 9, 1894. Folder: Ethnic Festival, Zapp Papers.

¹¹⁴ Daniel Akst, “JC Betting On the Future,” *NYT*, April 12, 1981.

¹¹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks At the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York,” October 3, 1965, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27292> (accessed December 8, 2007).

and heritage, by the Halfpenny Playhouse of Kearny. The closing song, “The Statue of Liberty Lives in Jersey City,” summed up well their perspective on the state ownership debate.¹¹⁶

So dear was the Jersey City’s connection to these immigrant memorials, that when the NPS and the Circle Line mutually agreed that ferry service should be canceled between Liberty State Park and the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, Mayor Thomas F.X. Smith, in opposition, threatened to cut off the water supply to both islands.¹¹⁷

The 1981 gubernatorial election brought NJ politics to the Right, reflective of a similar change on the national scene. Republican Thomas H. Kean became governor, beating James Florio in a tight race. Kean’s campaign had targeted ethnic groups, the “middle-class and working-class people who are caught between a tradition of Democratic affiliation and the appeal of the new Republican conservatism.” Furthermore, he offered a change in the eight years of the Democrat’s hold in Trenton, with specific proposals on the economy and crime, and a business background that gave him administrative experience. Reagan, whose politics will be examined in the next chapter, had used a similar message to the middle-class when campaigning through New Jersey the year before. The Republican presidential candidate had emerged victorious in the state, where voter registration was weighted two-to-one for Democrats.¹¹⁸ Barbara Salmore describes Kean as “a congenial and wily politician in the [former Governor Richard] Hughes mold.” He was a Republican who would bargain with the Democratic senate president, without mentioning it to the Republican house speaker, and was commended for persistently refusing “to deal in patronage or take political revenge.”¹¹⁹ Kean, an Episcopalian,

¹¹⁶ “Ethnic Festival of Music, Dance,” *The Dispatch*, October 9, 1979. Folder: Ethnic Festival, Zapp Papers.

¹¹⁷ Thomas F.X. Smith, *The Powerticians* (Secaucus, N.J: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1982), 12.

¹¹⁸ Richard J. Meislin, “The Kean Style Gets The Common Touch,” *NYT*, October 18, 1981.

¹¹⁹ Salmore, *New Jersey Politics and Government*, 133-134. On page 53, Salmore also points out that in New Jersey politics, statewide candidates, such as Kean, were able to “rise above ascriptive identifications.” When he ran for reelection in 1985, Kean not only won the majority of the black vote, he also defeated his Democratic opponent Peter Shapiro, “among Shapiro’s Jewish co-religionists.”

was also a patrician Republican and a millionaire. He was a direct descendant of William Livingston, first governor of New Jersey.¹²⁰ He did not share the same ethnic heritage of many of his constituents, but managed to appeal to

Liberty State Park was one of the “potentially hot political potatoes” that Kean was inheriting from his predecessor. In the years after the American bicentennial, Byrne had departed from supporting preservation plans, in favor of major commercial and residential development. The only agreement that could be reached among the park players was in the land’s value as a historic sight. Housing proposals included filling 199 acres with 8,200 units of housing or building 3,700 units modeled after a Dutch fishing village circa 1820. Uproar ensued, and Byrne left the fate of the park with Kean.¹²¹ Through the park’s development, Jersey City activists had fought off attempts from outside contractors to turn the park into a commercial space. Plans for one Disney-like, World’s Fair entertainment center involved 180 acres off the waterfront, with major attractions including halls devoted to the “American Dream” and the country’s heritage; a “Sesame Street” and folklore fantasy land; and a “Wonders of the World” of international pavilions and restaurants.¹²² Representative Joseph A. LeFante offered a vision inspired by the “old country villages” of Busch Gardens, Williamsburg, Va.¹²³ New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Phillip Alampi proposed turning the land into a farmland, complete with livestock and poultry.¹²⁴ The locals mobilized to move progress in the direction they saw fit, toward the completion of a free, public park. In a guest editorial in the *Jersey Journal*, Grundy, the city historian, urged the state to complete the park, “without expensive frills and without schemes of

¹²⁰ Maureen Dowd, “Kean, the Jersey Power, Tests the National Scene,” *NYT*, October 9, 1986.

¹²¹ Robert Hanley, “New Jersey Journal,” *NYT*, January 3, 1982.

¹²² “Proposal to Develop Liberty Park as a ‘World’s Fair’ Is Under Study,” *NYT*, July 29, 1977.

¹²³ Edward C. Burkes, “‘An Old Country Village’ Proposed by Le Fonte,” *NYT*, September 18, 1977.

¹²⁴ “Alampi Wants a Farm in Liberty Park Area,” *NYT*, September 9, 1977.

turning it over to private speculators for doll museums and phony ‘Williamsburgs.’”¹²⁵ Gordon Bishop, a columnist of 26 years for *The Star-Ledger*, called the park “a special gift from the people to the people ... an open commons for all to share – and care for.” He saw it as a tribute to the national monuments it stood behind, and “a welcome relief from the gray monotony of a megalopolis spilling out from Long Island to the Jersey Shore.”¹²⁶ These activists were calling for a public urban space.¹²⁷

Kean expanded upon his predecessor’s ethnic community outreach. Six months into office, he created the Office of Ethnic Affairs, which would include Byrne’s advisory council, expanded from 16 to 19 members, and would reside in the Department of State. Heralded as one of the few ethnic affairs offices in the country, it acted as the go-to for all things ethnic; it was a clearinghouse and an advocate, a sponsor for multi-ethnic festivals, and a participant in other special events.¹²⁸

Kean, from the campaign trail into office, also supported the expansion of the state’s tourism industry. By proposing to double the budget (to \$4 million) he hoped to bring more visitors and corporations in. “Unfortunately, negative perceptions about our state abound and need to be quickly, mercifully and permanently put to sleep,” the governor had said. As part of its revamping, the Division of Travel and Tourism, in place since 1977, abandoned its five-year-

¹²⁵ Grundy, “Visiting Editorial: Keep Our Park,” *Jersey Journal*, June 22, 1982. Friends of Liberty State Park, http://www.folsp.org/grundy_editorial.htm (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹²⁶ Gordon Bishop, “Include Yourself In The Shaping of Liberty Park’s Future,” *Star-Ledger*, December 9, 1981. NJR.

¹²⁷ These park battles would ensue. In 1988, that group of concerned Jersey City citizens formed the Friends of Liberty State Park, with its mission to care for the “sacred and uplifting NJ and American public space.” Friends of Liberty State Park, <http://www.folsp.org/>. More of a national trend in the 1980s, language categorizing historic sites as “sacred object and places” gradually became secularized. See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 678. Through the 1990s, as greater scale development took hold of the city, citizens recognized the need for an official organization to target and save historic landmarks. It was upon the foundation of historic preservation laid by figures such as Morris Pensin, Ted Conrad (advocate of Hudson County Courthouse), and J. Owen Grundy (Loews Jersey Theatre) that the Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy was founded in 1999. The nonprofit organization serves to organize and support preservation efforts citywide. See <http://www.jclandmarks.org>.

¹²⁸ Juhan Simonson to Jane Burgio, Re: Office of Ethnic Affairs – Long Range Plan FY’ 1990-95. May 10, 1988. Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

old advertising campaign and its slogan – “New Jersey’s Got It!” Officials recognized that the slogan was not sufficiently positive, and lent itself to jokes about the state. Tourism was rapidly becoming the state’s top industry. Hudson County had experienced the biggest increase in tourist numbers, primarily because of Liberty State Park.¹²⁹

The Liberty Park Festival, now an annual mid-September weekend tradition, expanded under the leadership of Kean’s council. The opening ceremonies of the 1984 festival, now referred to as “New Jersey’s Official Ethnic Festival,” added a new dimension to the celebrations by including a naturalization ceremony with 184 immigrants. The swearing-in ceremony, usually reserved for the county courthouse, became a tradition at the festival, looked to for its emotional resonance. The men and women, all Hudson County residents, hailed from countries including Cuba, Egypt, Uganda, Venezuela, Italy and Ireland. Kean spoke to the juxtaposition of old and new immigrants, likening the nation to a “great tree that gained its strength from its ethnic roots.” The new citizens were given small American flags to wave at the end of the ceremony.¹³⁰ Suddenly, these new immigrants shared a common past with the others.¹³¹

The attempt to foster a “multi-ethnic” environment did not provide the most historically accurate picture. Through history, tensions existed not only among races but also among ethnic groups.¹³² Cohen summarized this point well in his concluding chapter to *Folk Legacies Revisited*, “Reflections on American Ethnicity,” writing, “I do not adhere to the Pollyanna view

¹²⁹ Priscilla Van Tassel, “‘New Jersey’s Got It!’ Has Now Had It,” *NYT*, May 30, 1982; and Dirk Johnson, “For New York, a Bonanza of Summer Visitors,” *NYT*, September 2, 1986. The development of Atlantic City and the Meadowlands sports complex, as well as the Jersey Shore and the Pine Barrens were also attributed to the tourist growth.

¹³⁰ “New citizens take oath alongside ethnic celebration at Liberty Park,” *Star-Ledger*, September 9, 1984. Folder: Ethnic Festivals, Zapp Papers.

¹³¹ At the 1986 Festival, named “A Salute to Liberty,” immigrants from Cuba, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic were among the majority of the 30 nations represented. NJ State Official News Release, n.d. Box 7, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹³² Take, for example, the results of the New Jersey Ethnic Survey, an auxiliary project within the Federal Writer’s Project (begun in 1935). A compilation of immigrant case studies, it highlighted the unfriendly relationships that brewed between groups. The select sampling of the Ethnic Survey was compiled by David Steven Cohen and published in book form in 1990, *America, the Dream of My Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

of those cultural pluralists who think that all Americans need do is attend multiethnic festivals and sample unfamiliar foods and all tensions will be resolved.” Ethnicity had never been “a force for peace and understanding” in American history, nor could interethnic hostilities be easily relieved.¹³³

There were at least 500 local and 75 statewide and regional festivals being held throughout the state.¹³⁴ The Heritage Days Festival, celebrating Trenton’s tri-centennial in June 1979, brought together “Irish bagpipes and Afro-American dancers, sizzling Italian sausages and tropical fruit coolers, Hungarian history and Ukrainian borscht.”¹³⁵ Celebrating heritage was by no means confined to the park space. Through the 1970s and the 1980s, New Jersey residents participated in myriad festivals and events, such as the Annual Heritage Festival Ball. In 1981, over 400 members of the ethnic community were in attendance.¹³⁶ The Garden State Arts Center held annual festivals through the summer. For example, in 1985, the Polish Heritage Festival kicked off the summer in June, followed by the Festa Italian, the Ukrainian festival, Jewish Festival of the Arts, Irish Festival, German Heritage Festival, Scottish Heritage Festival, and Slovak Heritage Festival.¹³⁷

Cities held their own festivals, such as Hoboken’s St. Ann’s Festival, which President Reagan attended in his reelection year. In remarks to the community, Reagan good-naturedly claimed that the appeal for his visit lay in the event’s slogan: “St. Ann’s Festival, A Feast for the Senses.” “I’ll tell you about your secret weapon,” promised Reagan, charming the crowd. “I

¹³³ David Steven Cohen, *Folk Legacies Revisited* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 103.

¹³⁴ “Ethnic Traditions and Festivals,” n.d. Folder: Old Festival, Box 2, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹³⁵ “Celebrating Together,” *Trenton Times*, June 6, 1979. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹³⁶ Carl B.S. Pedersen to Brendan Byrne, Letter, February 13, 1981. Folder: Correspondence 1981, Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs, NJSA.

¹³⁷ *Compass*, Publication, 1985, 13. Box 7, Office of Ethnic Affairs, NJSA.

heard about your zeppoles. And so, here I am in Hoboken.”¹³⁸ The politics behind Reagan’s visit did not go unnoticed. New York Governor Mario Cuomo was outraged at what he called Reagan’s ‘pandering’ to the Catholic and the Italian-American vote. He imagined Reagan’s embracement of Frank Sinatra, whose hometown was Hoboken, was his way to secure the vote.¹³⁹

It seems that New Jersey’s ethnic public relations efforts were paying off, for in 1984, the state took its ethnic celebrations to the national stage. That year, the theme of the 17th Annual Festival of American Folklife, held on Washington D.C.’s National Mall, was the celebration of the ethnic groups of New Jersey.¹⁴⁰ First held in 1967, the Folklife Festival planners intended to celebrate “democratic art” and American creativity. By 1976, however, the festival had redefined itself, “to stimulate cultural self-awareness and inter-cultural understanding.”¹⁴¹ The *Washington Post* writer covering the event must have been just as confused as the next American as to why New Jersey, of all states, was at the center of things. “Turnpike Tribes Bring Their Eden to the Mall” read the sub-headline of the article, which satirized the event, while still managing to mention that nearly 100 ethnic groups comprised the state, along with more than a million acres of farmland. The exhibit included Sicilian-American marionette theater, Afro-Puerto Rican music and dance, and, for an authentic taste of the Jersey shore, the Barnegat Bay Sneak Box.¹⁴²

The varied agenda of the Office of Ethnic Affairs demonstrated its far-reaching influence. In the realm of education, it recommended a commission be established to review New Jersey’s public school textbooks to secure proper coverage of the history of the countries of East Europe.

¹³⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the St. Ann’s Festival in Hoboken, New Jersey,” July 26, 1984, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=40204&st=&st1=> (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹³⁹ “Cuomo Says Reagan ‘Pandering’ to Catholics,” *NYT*, July 23, 1984.

¹⁴⁰ Christian William, “In the Beginning Was New Jersey,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 1983.

¹⁴¹ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 55.

¹⁴² Christian William, “In the Beginning Was New Jersey.”

The office also assisted in a study on ethnic ties between the people of New Jersey and the lands of their origin, conducted by Jersey City State College. It lobbied for reparations for the American citizens of Japanese origin who were interned in World War II.¹⁴³

The New Jersey Center for the Development of Ethnic Programming demonstrated the need for attention to ethnic education. One goal of the center was to provide “technical assistance to local and state ethnic organizations and institutions (e.g. churches, Polish Homes and Falcon Camps, Czech Sokols, Slavic Mutual Aid Associations and the Saturday Schools) in order that they can develop and implement culturally tuned social service programming to their neighborhoods and communities.”

To further their point, the report’s authors contrasted the attention given to ethnic communities with that given to black Americans since the Civil Rights movement. The report read, “As an introduction to governmental indifference to the outstanding and unmet needs of ethnic people, it is appropriate that we begin with affirmation action.” It did not deny the historical and present discrimination faced by black Americans, but brought to light that “Eastern and Southern European heritage peoples (Poles, Hungarians, other Slavics, Italians and Greeks) have yet to achieve educational parity with the dominant whites of our stratified society.”¹⁴⁴ In discussing the need for such programming, the Center’s program prospectus recalled census data that recorded “three out of every ten New Jerseyans, or 2,155,863” to be of first and second generation foreign stock. To include third generation would be to viably factor in an additional 3 ½ million. Here, the size of the population was meant to underline its importance.

¹⁴³ Simonson to Jim Chianes, Report On Council Accomplishments 1982-1988, September 26, 1988. Box: 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁴⁴ Janos Gotsch and Reinhold Smyczek, NJ Center for the Development of Ethnic Programming Program Prospectus, n.d. Box 1, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

Such attention to ethnicity, specifically in education, received criticism from Nathan Glazer, who had been one of the first to dismiss the idea of the melting pot. “In 1964,” Nathan Glazer notes, “there was as yet almost no acknowledgment of a public responsibility to provide any assistance to groups to help them in maintaining their cultures or corporate characters.”¹⁴⁵ Glazer observed this change “in the period of heightened expectations and demands of minority groups of the later 1960s and 1970s: the state was now called upon directly to assist in the maintenance of group loyalty, native language, original culture.” Glazer traced state involvement in multicultural education, beginning with the advocacy of minority group pride (black, Mexican American, Asian American, and Puerto Rican), to the rewriting of history textbooks, to bilingual education acts (1968, 1974). The Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, first proposed in 1970 and implemented in 1974, was the push of the white ethnics.¹⁴⁶

New Jersey, as it positioned itself to be a leader in ethnic affairs, maintained communication with the ethnic and heritage committees of neighboring states. Perhaps following in the Garden State’s wake of initiative, the states of Maryland and Pennsylvania each had a publicly-appointed commission and an agency designed to deal with ethnic affairs.¹⁴⁷ The Maryland Ethnic Heritage Commission was a successor to the Commission on Ethnic Affairs, created in 1977. The Ethnic Heritage Commission advised the Governor on ethnic affairs and furthered public knowledge of ethnic history, while striving to promote understanding among

¹⁴⁵ Nathan Glazer, *Ethnic Dilemmas 1964-1982* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 126.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of other “Ethnic Centers,” designed to collect ethnic information and to serve as museums and archival holdings, see Bolino, *Ellis Island Source Book*, 153-155.

ethnic groups and the whole community.¹⁴⁸ The NJ Council maintained close contact with its counterparts for information exchange and discussion of areas of mutual interest.¹⁴⁹

New Jersey's newest governor in 1990 was Democrat James Florio, who continued the Office of Ethnic Affairs, maintaining these ethnic relations. As his proclamation noted, the "continued influx of new ethnic groups into New Jersey has precipitated the need to increase our awareness, appreciation and understanding of each of these new ethnic groups."¹⁵⁰ The rhetoric found within even this small excerpt reveals an attention that expands beyond recognition of contributions of past immigrants to recognition to the place of new immigrants in society. Florio designated September 15 and 16 as Liberty State Park Ethnic Festival Days, acknowledging the state as "unique in its rich ethnic diversity" and having "served as the gateway for many groups of immigrants coming to this country to 'find freedom and opportunity.'" He named ethnic communities "historically important because of the many contributions they have made to the growth, development and governance of the State and because the broad range of customs and histories that these groups have brought to this country continues to enhance the social and cultural life of New Jersey."¹⁵¹

Another tradition carried over from the Kean administration was the decoration of a Christmas tree at the governor's mansion, Drumthwacket, with donated ethnic ornaments. Initially, members of one ethnic community would have decorated the tree; in 1988, for example,

¹⁴⁸ Juhan Simonson to Ethnic Advisory Council, Re: Maryland Ethnic Heritage Commission, May 19, 1988; *The Maryland Manual 1987-1983*, Maryland State Archives, Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁴⁹ Simonson to Council, Re: Ethnic Tours, May 16, 1988. Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs, NJSA. The Director of the NJEAC attended a seminar entitled "Making the Most of your Ethnicity," presented by the Maryland Ethnic Heritage Commission in Baltimore.

¹⁵⁰ James J. Florio, "Proclamation 56," Continues Executive Orders 99 and 206 (Kean) for the Ethnic Advisory Council. Executive Orders, Official Web site for the State of New Jersey, <http://www.state.nj.us/infobank/circular/eof56.htm> (accessed April 8, 2008).

¹⁵¹ James J. Florio, Governor's Proclamation, "Ethnic Festival 1990," newspaper insert. Folder: Ethnic Festivals, Zapp Papers.

the Scandinavians contributed ornaments, in the year of the 350th anniversary of New Sweden.¹⁵² The state's First Lady, Lucinda Florio, coordinated the decoration. Letters soliciting ornaments were sent out to the vendors of the Ethnic Festival, evoking romanticism while likening the objects to be "as interesting as the multi-ethnic groups in New Jersey are and as sparkling as the eyes of any ethnic people when, with emotion, talk about their Christmas homecountry."¹⁵³

That year the Office of Ethnic Affairs also welcomed a new director, Maurice Fitzgibbons (of Hoboken), a man whose career had come to revolve around ethnic public relations. He became director in 1990, after four years as the administrator of the Hudson County division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs. Active with the Polish-American Association and the Hispanic Day Parade, honored as Irishman of the Year in Hoboken, a liaison to the N.J. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission, and a three-year cochairman of the county's Columbus Day Parade, Fitzgibbons certainly had a "multi-ethnic" background. To his new position he hoped to bring expanded educational programs and folk arts services. "State's rich diverse multi-cultural communities" He initiated the First Annual Governor's Inter-Cultural Freedom Parade at the 1990 Festival. The procession included the ethnic group participants in costume with flags, banners and bands.¹⁵⁴ Fitzgibbons represented the type of official who specialized in ethnic relations, a department that the state had solidified through the 1980s and through three governors.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Juhan Simonson to Ethnic Advisory Council, Re: Ethnic Holiday Traditions, January 29, 1988. Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁵³ Ines Matteus to Vendors from NJ Ethnic Festival, Ethnic Christmas Ornaments, November 18, 1991. Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁵⁴ "Meet Maurice Fitzgibbons, Director of the Office of Ethnic Affairs," "1990 Ethnic Festival," newspaper insert.

¹⁵⁵ In the 1980s, "diversity management" had become a multimillion dollar industry nationwide. Consultants specialized in helping businesses relieve racial tensions and train employees to "value difference" Heather McDonald, "Diversity Industry," *New Republic* (1993), as cited in Schulman, *The Seventies*, 72.

The Legacy of the Unmeltables

In 1998, Liberty State Park welcomed another monument to its collection. A gift from the Italian city of Genoa, “La Vela Di Colombo,” was a six-story bronze sail, decorated with bas-relief scenes of Christopher Columbus’s life. The sail, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ voyage, was to also serve as a reminder of the roles of New Jersey and New York in the nation’s immigration story. Citizens had the opportunity to memorialize their own immigrant ancestors on the monument’s marble base, similar to Ellis Island’s Immigrant Wall. Its unveiling, on October 9, 1998, coincided with the conclusion of the state’s \$10 million beautification project for the park.¹⁵⁶ As new immigrants continue to arrive to the area, the sail can also be seen as a monument to the ethnics of the Old World, and specifically the Italian-Americans, who have long embraced Columbus as their own. In the 1990s they remained the most represented group in the state. Perhaps one of the most recent testaments to their strength in the 21st century has been HBO’s *The Sopranos*, a drama documenting the lives of a Northern New Jersey mafia family.

The resurgence in identity yielded political and social power, creating valuable real estate out of urban wastelands. Jersey City’s, and the state’s, insistence on claiming a piece of the Liberty narrative lie in the benefits of association, but also in an importance in keeping close the ties that had been forged through the passage of older generations. Reflecting on his term as mayor from 1977 to 1981, Thomas X.F. Smith described his municipality as “a city with a dual identity, its own and one as a major supply depot for Manhattan and the other boroughs of New

¹⁵⁶ “Tributes of Christopher Columbus in the United States,” The National Italian American Foundation, http://www.niaf.org/research/report_columbus.asp (accessed November 15, 2007).; Liberty State Park: Christopher Columbus Monument Web site, http://www.libertystatepark.com/lsp%20hello_columbus.htm (accessed November 15, 2007).

York City just across the five ... a city whose limits enclose Liberty Island where the Statue of Liberty beckons to hundreds of thousands of yearning immigrants.”¹⁵⁷

In the Ethnic Advisory Council’s Winter 1989 Newsletter, Secretary of State Jane Burgio claimed, with substantive evidence from states across the nation, that New Jersey was “in the vanguard of states active in this [ethnic] field.”¹⁵⁸ It was revolutionary in not just the programming it offered to its ethnic communities, but also in its support. For example, while states across the country were following in the path of California’s Proposition 63, seeking amendments to include English as the official language in state constitutions, the Education Committee within NJ’s Council was observing the various language schools of its ethnic communities.

Thomas J. Espenshade, the editor of *Keys to Successful Immigration: Implications of the New Jersey Experience* (1997), suggests that the state “may be an example of immigrant exceptionalism.” His book’s studies “revealed that the impacts of immigration in New Jersey appear generally less negative and more positive than they do in the country as a whole.”¹⁵⁹ State and local governments’ recognition of the multitude of diverse communities, and consequent sponsorship, may have contributed to a better ethnic experience. As the state became directly involved with the ethnic groups, comprised of first-, second-, and third generations, it continued to perpetuate the boundaries of ethnicity. The bustling immigrants of New York City may have prompted Walt Whitman to declare the nation a “nation of nations,” but New Jersey’s response to the ethnic revival fashioned a “state of nations.”

¹⁵⁷ Thomas F.X. Smith, *The Powerticians* (Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1982), 10.

¹⁵⁸ Jane Burgio, “Message From the Secretary of State,” *NJ Ethnic Advisory Council Newsletter* 3:1 (Winter 1989), Box 9, Office of Ethnic Affairs.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Espenshade, *Keys to Successful Immigration: Implications of the New Jersey Experience*, 6. For the earlier published results of the same Princeton University study, see Espenshade, *A Stone’s Throw From Ellis Island: Economic Implications of Immigration to New Jersey* (New York: University Press of America, 1994).

Chapter Two will move beyond the jurisdiction of New Jersey, off the mainland, to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. By exploring the social and political conditions surrounding the restoration of those national monuments to immigration, came to symbolize the restoration of the nation and its American identity.

– CHAPTER TWO –

Liberty Weekend 1986: Celebrating an American Identity

“But our national character is based on a common identity with a single ideal, a shared value that overcomes our differences and unites us as a people.”

— Ronald Reagan, 1982¹

The campaign advertisement poised the presidential candidate in a scene of American patriotism. The Star-Spangled Banner flapped in the Hudson River breeze. In the near distance, one of the nation’s greatest monuments seemed to tower over even the skyscrapers. The Statue of Liberty, dwarfing Ronald Reagan at his podium in the corner, was the focus of this photo. The campaign brochure lettering read in bold: “‘We Share the Same Dream’ – Elect Ronald Reagan to preserve those dreams.”² The photograph had been taken at the kick-off event to Reagan’s fall 1980 campaign, held in Liberty State Park. The strategic location fit with what campaign advisors saw as an “Americanism” rally, calling the event an “ethnic picnic.”³ These key words defined not just the campaign but even more so the legacy Reagan sought to create. This chapter explores how Americanism and ethnicity became synonymous in presidential rhetoric in the 1980s and how the story of the immigrant became a success story of individualism, on public display during the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

That first day of September, among the throngs of thousands in the park, ethnic group representatives waved the flags of their native home countries.⁴ Reagan was addressing a nation still haunted by the Vietnam War and dealing with a struggling economy. Here in New Jersey

¹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks Announcing the Formation of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission,” May 18, 1982, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42536&st=&st1=> (accessed January 20, 2008).

² Reagan Presidential Campaign Brochure, 1980. Vertical File: Statue of Liberty 1980-1985, New Jersey Room Collection, Jersey City Public Library, Jersey City, N.J. (hereafter cited as NJR).

³ Howell Raines, “Republican Stresses Economy,” *New York Times*, September 2, 1980.

⁴ *Ibid.*

and across the nation, he wooed the ethnic voting blocs that had long been tied to the Democratic Party. The Republican candidate evoked powerful cultural memories attached to the immigrants of yesteryear. “We must have the same sense of self-determination shown by those who preceded us to this great country,” he declared. “They brought with them courage, ambitions, the values of family, of neighborhood and work. While they came from different lands, they shared the same values, the same dreams.”⁵ His narrative reined in the past two decades’ pluralist visions.

At the rally, Reagan stressed his economic policies, while the father of the leader of Polish workers strike stood by on stage. The social and political changes of the 1960s had left many working class Americans worried. Godfrey Hodgson classified that pervasive mood as a class phenomenon, not solely “ethnic.” Whether they were Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant, immigrant or native, these Middle Americans no longer saw the Roosevelt coalition as the natural political defender of their interests.⁶ Reagan’s vision was not quite the melting pot idea resurrected. There were certainly many voices present, however – from Reagan and his fellow patriots, to ethnic politicians and disgruntled Democrats, to historians debating how all this history was to be presented. And there was the American public, taking part in fundraising and spirit-raising, while being bombarded with the image of Liberty. This chapter will examine those voices.

Reagan Democrats who voted for Reagan turned out in droves not only in New Jersey but nationwide, totaling 22 percent of the party. Many of these defecting party members were voters seeking to reverse the government favor they saw bestowed on black Americans and other minorities. These Democrats agreed that civil rights leaders were asking for too much, and they

⁵ Reagan Presidential Campaign Brochure, 1980.

⁶ Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 148-149.

opposed special government aid to minorities and government intervention in employment and housing issues. In their eyes, the distributive policies of the Democratic Party that once benefited their families, friends, and neighborhoods now benefited minorities at the expense of the working and middle class.⁷

The Statue of Liberty, which had stood majestically in the background of Reagan's campaign, would come metaphorically to the forefront of his presidency. Reagan engaged the nation in a great restoration effort to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the statue's dedication. In an article in the special Summer 1986 edition of *Newsweek*, historian John Higham called the centennial a "dramatic episode" in the national effort to "move away from the excesses of cultural pluralism [and] to emphasize the common elements in American life."⁸ The Ethnic Advisory Council of New Jersey had been created in the spirit of pluralism. Each ethnic group was recognized for its own uniqueness and value. Reagan trampled upon the idea that each group had its own needs, instead favoring a single image of America.

The Fourth of July festivities in the year of the Statue of Liberty's centennial were named Liberty Weekend. In all senses, it was a celebration of the nationalism that had swept the country since the return of conservatism that accompanied Reagan's election in 1981. The 1970s had created, in Hodgson's words, "a pervasive, deeply felt sense that the country was in trouble; that it was in danger of losing its reputation as well as its power in the world; and that the rot could be stopped not by government, but only by a robust reassertion of traditional American beliefs."⁹ The crisis of the cities brought to the nation's attention in the 1960s had not subsided. In 1975, as

⁷ Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 164.

⁸ Tom Morganthau and Maggie Malone, "The Dream Endures," *Newsweek: Collector's Edition* (Summer 1986): 18. Statue of Liberty Press Clippings 1986, Library at the Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York, N.Y. (hereafter cited as STLI 1986).

⁹ Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up*, 219.

New York City neared bankruptcy, President Gerald Ford refused to allocate federal funds to bail it out. “Ford to City: Drop Dead,” reported the front page of *The Daily News*.¹⁰

If the American people felt their nation’s troubles, then by taking part in the restoration of the New York Harbor monuments, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, they were given a chance to restore America in her glory. This was the message inherent in the Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation’s red, white, and blue bumper sticker, complete with the trademarked insignia of Liberty’s face and with the slogan, “I’m Saving the Statue of Liberty.”¹¹

From Roosevelt to Reagan

Decades before the centennial celebration, the Statue of Liberty’s significance in American culture had transformed. The statue evolved from a French gift celebrating the United States as a model of liberty to a symbol of welcome and refuge for immigrants seeking a better life. The immigrants on ships sailing into the New York Harbor gateway may have had their carried their own interpretations of the statue with them, but it took decades for the redemptive interpretation to enter official US culture. The idea of the statue as a symbol for the nation took root in the late 1930s, as the statue itself gained popularity.¹²

In honor of the Statue’s 50th anniversary in 1936, patriotic organizations and public schools organized nationwide celebration, keeping with the usual themes of Franco-American friendship and liberty as an abstract idea.¹³ The nation’s public schools had long been entrusted

¹⁰ Sam Roberts, “When the City’s Bankruptcy was Just A Few Words Away,” *NYT*, December 31, 2006.

¹¹ Bumper Sicker, The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

¹² For a full description of the transformation of the statue’s meaning to Americans, and further discussion of Roosevelt’s speech, see Higham, *Send These To Me*, 71-80.

¹³ Higham, 74.

with the “Americanization” of immigrant children, and this patriotic commemoration would be no different, harking back to the nation’s founding ideals.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s anniversary address appended a message of peace to the Statue’s message of liberty. America was a beacon of light, as captured in Liberty’s lamp. It offered promise to the people who settled the land over three centuries. Roosevelt recognized the immigrant history of the nation, but the immigrants he described were not quite Emma Lazarus’ “huddled masses” and “wretched refuse”:

It has not been sufficiently emphasized in the teaching of our history that the overwhelming majority of those who came from the Nations of the Old World to our American shores were not the laggards, not the timorous, not the failures. They were men and women who had the supreme courage to strike out for themselves, to abandon language and relatives, to start at the bottom without influence, without money and without knowledge of life in a very young civilization.¹⁴

The president’s words celebrated the unity of the American people. Although “those who have left their native land to join us may still retain here their affection for some things left behind,” they “wisely choose that their children shall live in the new language and in the new customs of this new people.” This American unity came from “hope for a common future,” not “reverence for a common past.” His words captured the essence of the idea of the melting pot.

Later that day, Roosevelt moved from Bedloe’s Island to Manhattan Island. He followed, however unintentionally, the path of many immigrants who, after passing by the Statue of Liberty and through Ellis Island, moved to the Lower East Side. That day the president visited Roosevelt Park, which had been named after his mother. In his remarks, he referenced the immigrants of the neighborhood and their zealous drive toward Americanization. In the shadow of decrepit tenements, he spoke to the long-neglected housing problem in the city, vowing to

¹⁴ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Address on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty,” October 28, 1936, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15210&st=&st1=> (accessed January 20, 2008).

improve conditions.¹⁵ With the passage of a 1934 housing law, many area landlords had boarded up their tenements rather than invest money to bring them up to code. Among the buildings closed was 97 Orchard Street, the fate of which is the focus of Chapter Three. The president's New Deal would involve the national government in urban areas "in the interest of domestic tranquility, economic recovery, and political gain, as well as because of its compassion for people," notes Gelfand. New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia lobbied for those federal-municipal ties.¹⁶

Roosevelt's connections also ran deep with the mayor's office, where LaGuardia governed, from 1933 to 1945. Son of a lapsed Catholic Italian father and a Jewish mother, LaGuardia was raised Episcopalian and held a job as an interpreter at Ellis Island while studying law.¹⁷ He rejected the Irish-dominated Tammany Hall and joined the Republican Party. In 1916, he became the first Lower East Side native Congressman since the Civil War. LaGuardia established a liberal record, calling the immigration bureau's proceedings at Ellis Island "cruel, inhuman, narrow-minded, prejudiced." He established a close friendship with the commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization at Ellis Island, Edward Corsi, who also sought more liberal immigration policies.¹⁸ His successful bid for mayor came on the fusion ticket.

LaGuardia worked closely with Roosevelt, who became a symbol of the alignment of ethnic groups under the national Democratic Party. Long the friend of the ethnic voter in local politics, the Democratic Party had received such identification on the national level with the rise of Alfred E. Smith. Smith – the picture-perfect image of American assimilation with his Italian,

¹⁵ "Address at Roosevelt Park, New York City," October 28, 1936, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15211&st=&st1=> (accessed January 20, 2008).

¹⁶ Gelfand, *Nation of Cities*, 384-385.

¹⁷ S.J. Woolf, "The Job of Mayor As Laguardia Sees It," *NYT*, September 17, 1933.

¹⁸ "Corsi Quits Post on Ellis Island," *NYT*, February 2, 1934; and "LaGuardia Threat Answered By Davis," *NYT*, December 10, 1922.

German, Irish Catholic and Anglo-Irish Protestant background – had been raised in the Lower East Side. He identified as Irish Catholic and had a reputation for honesty and a genuine desire to help the poor and working class. He drew in votes from across the cultural spectrum, including Italians, Germans, Irish, Jewish, and even African Americans. In the 1928 presidential election, Smith carried the nation's twelve largest cities all "centers of immigration and ethnic strength." By 1932, the ethnic groups gave Roosevelt an even greater share of their votes. The Depression had ensured their new Democratic allegiance.¹⁹

Perhaps no other Italian-American in the national spotlight championed President Roosevelt (and civil rights) in the 1940s more than Frank Sinatra. Sinatra was a Democrat-through-and-through; his mother had worked for the Hague machine of Hudson County. (Dolly Sinatra was named leader of the third ward in Hoboken's Ninth District because of her familiarity with the many dialects of Italian spoken there.)²⁰ More importantly, everything Sinatra did, he did as an Italian-American, even refusing to change his name to Frankie Satin.²¹ He refused assimilation, decades before the crowds caught on.

Sinatra affirmed his heritage and advocated for civil rights with his role in the 10-minute short subject "The House I Live In." He played himself in the clip, in which he stops a gang of young white boys from bullying their Jewish peer. "We don't like him. ... We don't like his religion," the boys explain to Sinatra when he asks what was going on. Sinatra responds, "This country's made of a hundred different kinds of people. My dad came from Italy, but I'm an American." He serenaded the would-be bullies with his song, singing "All races and religions /

¹⁹ Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 190-191.

²⁰ Michael Nelson, "Frank Sinatra and Presidential Politics" in *Frank Sinatra: History, Identity, and Italian American Culture*, ed. Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 48.

²¹ Rocco Marinaccio, "I Get No Kick From Assimilation," in *Frank Sinatra: History, Identity, and Italian American Culture*, ed. Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 195.

That's America to me.”²² It was the melting pot hit single of 1945, ranking among the year's top 40 records. Sinatra sang the national anthem at the 1956 Democratic National Convention, and became a prominent John F. Kennedy enthusiast in his 1960 campaign. Kennedy's image of “glamour, grace and inspirational leadership” appeared similar to Sinatra's own charismatic charge.²³

Despite his Democratic dealings, Sinatra, like much of white ethnic America, changed his party allegiances in the 1970s. It began with his endorsement of Ronald Reagan's reelection in the California gubernatorial race. Then he co-chaired Democrats for Reagan.²⁴ He and Dean Martin appeared in concert to raise money for the campaign.²⁵

Reagan Democrats were relatively new to the conservative landscape: for the most part, they were white, working-class Northerners who supported liberal economic programs, but begrudged policies that led to “reverse discrimination.” They joined the ranks of Southern white opponents of civil rights, Republicans who advocated for smaller government, and religious social conservatives (Catholics and evangelical Protestants alike).²⁶ They had once been the bastion of the New Deal coalition – the European white ethnics of the north and the Southern white populists of the south. Their votes determined the viability of the liberal coalition, and once they swung, the liberals were left alone.²⁷ This political shift on the national level also occurred on the state level, as in New Jersey's election of Thomas Kean in 1982.

²²“The House I Live In,” words by Louis Allen, music by Early Robinson (1942), in *Of Thee I Sing: Lyrics and Music for America's Most Patriotic Songs*, ed. Jerry Silverman, 208-212 (New York: Citadel Press, 2002); and “Frank Sinatra- The House I Live In video short (1945),” posted March 5, 2007, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=iMM6BOPSNGc> (accessed January 22, 2008).

²³ Isserman and Kazin, *American Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59.

²⁴ Nelson, “Frank Sinatra and Presidential Politics,” 65.

²⁵ “Reagan to Raise Funds with a Sinatra Concert,” *NYT*, October 1, 1979.

²⁶ For further discussion of the rise of Reagan Democrats, see Patterson, 130-132.

²⁷ Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 4.

Decades later, Sinatra sang “The House I Live In” at Reagan’s 1985 inauguration. Sinatra “represented Reagan’s Hollywood roots and the journey so many Reagan Democrats traveled from the New Deal to this new dynasty,” writes historian Gil Troy.²⁸ The glamour of the president’s inauguration ceremony hinted at what the nation could expect for the events to commemorate the State of Liberty. Critics of Sinatra’s performance saw beyond the patriotic gleam. They claimed Sinatra had been “washed of his ethnic identity,” serenading Nancy Reagan, and forgetting his roots.²⁹

Sinatra sang “The House I Live In” again for Reagan on the opening night of Liberty Weekend ’86. A few days earlier, Reagan had announced that July 4, 1986 would be “National Immigrant’s Day.” His official proclamation borrowed some of Roosevelt’s 1936 words, spoken on the occasion of Lady Liberty’s 50th anniversary. Some of Reagan’s sentences were identical to those of the 32nd president:

For more than three centuries, a human tide of men, women, and children ... have brought to us strength and moral fiber developed in civilizations centuries old, but fired anew by the dream of a better life in America. They have brought to us in this young country the treasure of a hundred ancient cultures.³⁰

Roosevelt had originally spoken of the “steady stream”; Reagan described the immigrants as “a human tide.” Otherwise, Reagan addressed a very similar audience that had once flocked to FDR. This Republican’s policies, however, were formed with a different agenda.

Reagan was familiar with Roosevelt’s style, because he, too, had been a liberal Democrat for half of his adult life. His move to the right in the 1950s came from a growing disdain for government regulation of business and a deep hatred of communism. As Isserman and Kazin

²⁸ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 50.

²⁹ Marinaccio, “I Get No Kick From Assimilation,” 192.

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Proclamation 5510 – National Immigrants Day, 1986,” July 2, 1986. *American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=37543&st=&st1=> (accessed February 20, 2008).

note, Reagan “inversed” New Deal rhetoric, replacing “older stories of workers abused by corporate power with fresh anecdotes about women leaving their husbands so they could be eligible to receive big welfare checks.”³¹ Among the contrasts that can be made between anniversary commemorations is that the centennial celebrated not just the statue, but also its neighboring immigration depot. How Ellis Island took on the same mythic status as the statue will be discussed next.

Enshrining Ellis Island

On that October day President Lyndon Johnson signed his monumental Immigration Bill of 1965, he was seated at a desk at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Physically and symbolically, he was facing Ellis Island. Though it had been made a national historic site in just the previous months, the island was rejected as a possible site for the ceremony. It was “in a pretty sorry state of upkeep,” according to the president’s press secretary.³² The island had been virtually abandoned since it had processed its last immigrant in 1954. In the intervening years, salvage dealers made their own trips there by motorboat late at night to rob the old immigration station of its copper eaves and gutters. Inside the buildings, they grabbed at copper and brass pipes, destroying hundreds of oaken water closets and dismantling the powerhouse wiring in the process. A whole storeroom of dishes had disappeared.³³

In the eleven years that Ellis Island lay undisturbed, different ideas for its future were proposed, but no one plan held enough appeal to be adopted. The city of New York suggested the island be used to house delinquent boys or made into a rehabilitation center for alcoholics

³¹ Isserman and Kazin, *American Divided*, 224.

³² Douglas Kiker, “Alien Bill: Statue of Liberty Signing,” *Herald Tribune*, October 1, 1965. Folder: Statue of Liberty, 1965-1980, Zapp Papers.

³³ Elliot Willensky, “A Nation Finally Remembers,” *Historic Preservation*, July/August 1983. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

and drug addicts. The state of New Jersey wanted it to house a New Jersey ethnic museum. Other propositions included a tuberculosis hospital, a federal hall of fame for foreign-born Americans, a type of American Tivoli Gardens (as in Copenhagen), or a gambling casino.³⁴

Even architect Philip Johnson, commissioned by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, could not produce a popular plan for the immigration station. Johnson, who had gained a reputation of being a rebel and reactionary, called himself a classicist and a traditionalist, one who took tradition and made something new of it.³⁵ Johnson's vision for Ellis Island had no intentions to preserve the immigration station's buildings. Rather, it called for stabilizing them as historic ruins and planting trees and ivy to create a "romantic and nostalgic grouping," which visitors could survey from above on a concrete walkway.³⁶ The island's architectural centerpiece would be a hollow, vertically ribbed cone 300 feet in diameter and 130 feet wide (20 feet shorter than the Statue of Liberty's pedestal), with ramps descending from the cornice to the ground. Along the ramp would be plaques listing the name of every immigrant that had passed through.

The plan, although endorsed by Udall and New York Senator Jacob Javits, was generally opposed by the press. The *World Telegram and Sun* called it "romanticism run riot." The "Wall of Sixteen Million" itself drew criticism; the *Herald Tribune* thought it was "ugly" and the *New York Times* considered a wall to be the least appropriate construction for a national shrine that was called "America's gateway."³⁷ Johnson's design difficulties were only the beginning of decades of debates on the character of historic preservation. Architects would face opposition to their designs; in the words of Ross Holland, former National State Park associate director and director of preservation and restoration for the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, "The

³⁴ "Immigrants Remember Ellis Island," *Jersey Journal*, February 2, 1967.

³⁵ "Architect of Elegance," *NYT*, November 16, 1964.

³⁶ Barbara Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant: An Administrative History of the Statue of Liberty National Monument 1952-1982* (New York: Institute for Research in History, 1985), 108-109.

³⁷ Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant*, 108-109.

historical architect thinks more in terms of evolution, while the modern architect is more oriented to revolution.”³⁸

To observe the union of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, the New York City National Shrines Advisory Board issued a commemorative medal featuring one monument on each side.³⁹ The Shrines Advisory Board had been created in 1954 to advise the rehabilitation and preservation of national shrines in New York, primarily Castle Clinton, Federal Hall, and the Statue of Liberty.⁴⁰ Members of the board included the mayor, the Manhattan borough president, the president of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and the president and the executive director-secretary of the Downtown Manhattan Association. With the board’s guidance, the National Park Service hoped to create at Castle Clinton (formerly the Aquarium and before that Castle Garden, through which the mayor’s father, Senator Robert F. Wagner, passed as an immigrant from Germany) a museum of pre-inaugural history; at Federal Hall, the site of Washington’s inauguration, a demonstration of early American history; and at the statue, a museum of immigration.⁴¹ In 1967, in celebration of Ellis Island’s 75th anniversary of its role as an immigration station, the National Shrines Association and the Bill of Rights Commemorative Society presented these gold commemorative medallions to President Johnson and Mayor John V. Lindsay, among others.⁴²

Besides such symbolic gestures, Ellis Island received little attention in the next years following the failure of Philip Johnson’s proposal. The book *Ellis Island* (1971), with text by Thomas Dunne and photography by Wilton Tiffe, contrasted pictures from government archives

³⁸ F. Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider’s View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 152.

³⁹ August C. Bolino, *The Ellis Island Source Book* (Washington, D.C.: Kensington Historical Press, 1985), 53.

⁴⁰ “Education Sparks City Council Fight; Congress Asked to Establish Advisory Board to Help Preserve Shrines Here,” *NYT*, February 24, 1954.

⁴¹ “Board Considers Historic Shrines,” *NYT*, February 4, 1956.

⁴² Bolino, *Ellis Island Source Book*, 53.

of the new arrivals with pictures of the island's dilapidation of the time. Dunne's text includes quotations from the time period of the black and white photos, as well as commentary about the contemporary situation. One book reviewer, upon seeing Tifft's photos of the ruined buildings and considering their sad legacy, astutely captured the nation's mood: "One feels a large and ominous metaphor looming in the back of the mind. Perhaps it would be better to leave it there. It's impossible to resist wondering though, how those people staring wistfully from the docks would feel today at the prospect of entering 'The Land of Promise.'"⁴³

The bicentennial would begin to draw more interest to the island. Peter Sammartino, former President and Chancellor of Fairleigh Dickinson University, created the Restore Ellis Island Committee, while serving as Chairman of the International Bicentennial Commission of New Jersey. His parents, both Italian immigrants, had come through Ellis Island. A helicopter trip over New York Harbor in January 1974 exposed to him the dilapidated conditions of the area and prompted him to approach his bicentennial committee. That July, the committee unanimously voted to "further the establishment of a museum and recreational park on Ellis Island." A multitude of ethnic organizations joined in the fundraising efforts by contacting congressmen, publicizing activities in their own bulletins, sending press releases, and organizing trips to the island.⁴⁴

Officials allowed the media to tour the island, encouraging them to write about the conditions they encountered. A local *Jersey Journal* reporter came upon the decay, which from a distance may have appeared mild, but he saw, "at closer range, the truth [was] painfully evident." The sea winds had stripped the "four lofty copulas" of their decorative copper. The grounds were "covered with stubble and thick roots," where there once were gardens tended by detained

⁴³ Anatole Broyard, "Welcome to Promised Land?" review of *Ellis Island* by Wilton S. Tifft and Thomas Dunne, *NYT*, September 24, 1971.

⁴⁴ Bolino, *Ellis Island Source Book*, 120.

immigrants. The unruly nature of the grounds had broken into the buildings themselves, with ivy “climbing up short walls and into broken windows, spilling down to floors inside, adding a mockingly decorative touch to rooms that are tragically neglected.”⁴⁵

Similar to how the bicentennial celebration in New Jersey introduced the nation to Liberty State Park, celebrations also opened up Ellis Island to the nation. On May 28, 1976, after twenty-two years of abandonment, Ellis Island was reopened in its “original condition.” “Tourists will view a shrine to immigration,” read a headline in the *Star-Ledger*.⁴⁶ Visitors were able to experience for themselves the decrepit conditions inside and outside the former immigration depot. There were no displays, nor any museum artifacts. The story was left to be told by the buildings and the island themselves. Outside, the visitors encountered the “overwhelming impression of age, neglect and decay,” Inside, they saw “peeling paint, sometimes forming picturesque patterns on rusted steel doors; water spots from old leaks; darkened, lonely incandescent globes hanging still from the high ceilings; almost no furnishings at all.” To a number of tourists, the sights brought back memories of when they had passed through the immigration depot. Immigrants who had this return trip to the gateway were encouraged by the National Park Service to share their stories with fellow tour members. Unaware of the future debates concerning the island’s presentation of its history, one reporter summarized the sentiment of Ellis Island exceptionalism, “Unlike other historic sites, Ellis Island needs no fancy multi-media presentations or elaborate displays.”⁴⁷ Plans for development, for the time being, were modest.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Patricia Donnelly, “Ellis Island getting ready for visitors,” *Jersey Journal*, March 29, 1976. File: Ellis Island Pre-1980, NJR.

⁴⁶ Gordon Bishop, “Ellis Island reopening in ‘original condition,’” *Star-Ledger*, May 28, 1976. File: Ellis Island Pre-1980, NJR.

⁴⁷ “Ellis Island Tours Start New Saturday,” *Jersey Journal*, May 22, 1976. File: Ellis Island Pre-1980, NJR.

⁴⁸ Robert D. McFadden, “Tourist Boats Due at Ellis Island,” *NYT*, May 28, 1976.

The original ferryboat, the “Ellis Island,” which had carried workers and immigrants to New York, had been left to deteriorate in its slip, while new ferries took tourists to the shrine. For the next year, ferry access was limited to departures from New York until the debut of “Miss Freedom.” The 500-passenger, 135-foot long, doubled-decked, red-and-white ferry set sail for Ellis Island, with Governor Byrne and New York Mayor Abraham D. Beame (himself an Ellis Island immigrant), on board. Miss Freedom would make four daily trips from Battery Park and three from Liberty State Park, taking passengers on a one-hour tour of Ellis Island. The tours visited only approved sections on the northern section of the 23-acre land, including the Great Hall.⁴⁹ By the early 1980s, nearly one and three-quarter million people were taking the boat ride to visit the Statue of Liberty each year; Ellis Island was attracting 67,000 visitors in the warm season. There were more people visiting the statue per square foot than any other Park Service monument.⁵⁰

The ongoing development of Liberty State Park vested New Jersey officials with a particular interest in the future of Ellis Island. In the aftermath of bicentennial celebrations, in October 1976, Byrne escorted nearly 100 representatives of ethnic groups of New Jersey on a guided two-hour tour of the immigration station grounds. He urged them to take the lead in rehabilitating the island into a museum. Byrne envisioned the museum taking shape alongside the progressing development of the state park.⁵¹

That same October, Jersey City Mayor Paul T. Jordan began looking ahead to the Statue of Liberty’s centennial in 1986. Morris Pesin was named to the “Operation Countdown” committee, along with members of the Jersey City Bicentennial Commission. In an event

⁴⁹ “Harbor Hails New Ellis Island Ferry,” *The Dispatch*, May 13, 1977. Folder: Ellis Island Pre-1980, Zapp Papers.

⁵⁰ Willensky, “A Nation Finally Remembers.”

⁵¹ “Ethnic groups urged to lead on Ellis Island,” *Jersey Journal*, October 12, 1976. Folder: Ellis Island Pre-1980, Zapp Papers.

conceived by Pesin, city officials would count down the years until Liberty's 100th by making an annual pilgrimage to the monument.⁵² Eighteen school children from Martin Luther King School in Jersey City, each of a different ethnicity, would accompany the officials on the trip from Liberty State Park to the Statue of Liberty. The children, dressed in costumes from their native land, joined in the pledge of allegiance and "God Bless America."⁵³

Congress appropriated \$1 million to Ellis Island, at the behest of Sammartino, in 1976. The sum was enough for the park service to mobilize and establish the creation of a master plan. Michael Alderstein, a New York-based architect and planner for the Denver Service Center, was put in charge of the effort of the effort.⁵⁴ Ford signed a bill setting aside \$1 million, with \$500,000 allocated annually by the NPS for ongoing repairs and upkeep. The sea wall, slipping into the harbor, was "identified for immediate work" and old roofs, windows and doors were replaced.⁵⁵ August Bolino's proposed plans for a research facility on Ellis Island attracted the attention of Congressman Edward Koch (elected New York City mayor in 1978), who then submitted a joint resolution to Congress that \$37 million be authorized for the island. Congressman Jonathan Bingham joined Koch in a resolution to increase it to \$50 million. Though the Koch-Bingham resolution did not pass, \$24 million was authorized for Ellis Island restoration in October 1978.⁵⁶

When Philip Lax, president of the Ellis Island Restoration Commission (which came to be comprised of 50 representatives of various ethnic groups) defended the idea of Ellis Island as

⁵² "Jordan selects panel for Miss Liberty's 100th," *Jersey Journal*, October 1, 1976. File: Bicentennial Celebration, NJR.

⁵³ Bonna Leusner, "Jersey pupils salute Miss Liberty at 94," *Star-Ledger*, October 29, 1980. Folder: Statue of Liberty, 1965-1980, Zapp Papers. Each year's pilgrimage celebrated a different theme. The 1980 celebration was a call to vote. Subjects of past years had been senior citizens, the handicapped and the United Nations' International Year of the Child.

⁵⁴ Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels and the Lady*, 143.

⁵⁵ Jacqueline A. Bausse, "Ellis Island: An 'Isle of Tears'" *metro-Newark*, 1979. Folder: Ellis Island Pre-1980, Zapp Papers.

⁵⁶ Bolino, *Ellis Island Source Book*, vi.

a national monument, he likened it to other historic memorials. “When one thinks of the American Revolution, one thinks of the Washington monument,” Lax said. “When one thinks of the Civil War, one thinks of the Lincoln Memorial. But there is not one monument in the U.S. that deals with and is dedicated to the immigrants.”⁵⁷ In 1985, Barbara Blumberg’s *Celebrating the Immigrant* phrased it differently: “The Statue of Liberty National Monument [including both Liberty and Ellis] is unique in that it does not commemorate a particular historic event of personage, but rather celebrates a set of ideals”⁵⁸ What those ideals would be, would take form during official centennial restorations.

Celebrating the Immigrant was a government-issued history of the Statue of Liberty National Monument compiled by Blumberg for the National Park Service. Blumberg opened chapter one with one visitor’s impressions. The high school girl, who had come to the United States from South Vietnam seven years beforehand, called the statue “one of the most beautiful symbols of the United States.” For her, it symbolized “freedom, liberty and everything the United States stands for.” Blumberg marveled that this “recent-American schoolgirl” who was “part of the newest immigrant influx to our shores” was able to so succinctly convey the symbolism behind the monument.⁵⁹

Restoring Monuments, Restoring the Nation

Photographer and critic Charles Hagen sums up the difference between the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island well. The statue was always intended to be a monument. Ellis Island, on the other hand, became a symbol over time. The history of the island made it difficult for this icon to develop, for in its years as an immigration station, it received immigrants with wariness

⁵⁷ Jacqueline A. Bausse, “Ellis Island: An ‘Isle of Tears.’”

⁵⁸ Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant*, 1.

⁵⁹ Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant*, 1.

and a lack of sympathy rather than the warmth of Liberty's torch.⁶⁰ Though Hagen discusses these attributes as challenges to photography of the island, this contradiction had to be overcome for Ellis Island to join the statue in the nation's collection of mythic symbols.

The island had been paired with the Statue of Liberty as a National Monument in 1965, but no action had been taken so it could fulfill that role. The formation of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission in 1982 officially changed that. The repairs needed to be completed. As Lady Liberty would be repaired, so would Ellis Island.

President Reagan announced the formation of the commission, basing the nation's character "on a common identity with a single ideal." Ellis Island, though no longer functioning in its original capacity, would continue to contribute to the nation as "a unifying memory for millions of our citizens."⁶¹ The commission and its affiliate, the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, intended to raise \$230 million for the restoration of the two national monuments, for the establishment of a memorial to immigrants, and to "teach the traditions of liberty" through the monuments' centennials.⁶²

⁶⁰ Charles Hagen, "Ellis Island: Symbol and Reality," in *Ellis Island: Echoes from a Nation's Past*, ed. Susan Jonas, 64 (New York: *Aperture Foundation*, 1989). The book *Ellis Island* accompanied a major photographic exhibition organized by Montclair State College and the National Park Service. The exhibition, conceived by Klaus A. Schnitzer, was presented at the Ellis Island Museum in honor of the opening to the public in 1990.

⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Announcing the Formation of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission," May 18, 1982, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42536&st=&st1=> (accessed January 20, 2008). The idea of restoring the Statue of Liberty first occurred to a French metalwork engineer, Jacques Moutard, as he was restoring a much smaller statue of copper and iron framework in France. Around the same time an American architectural assessment had revealed the weathered conditions of the New York Harbor statue. After initial contact, the French remained active in the restoration process until the end and were participants in the final ceremonies. Frederick Allen, "Saving the Statue," *American Heritage Magazine* 53:4 (June/July 1984), http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1984/4/1984_4_97.shtml (accessed February 20, 2008).

To commemorate this special Franco-American alliance, the postmasters of both countries issued a Liberty stamp, using the same design – a close-up of Liberty's profile in blue and red. The only differences in the countries' stamps were language, currency and denominations. "France, U.S. Issue Stamp," *Saturday Oklahoma Times*, July 5, 1986. STLI 1986.

⁶² "The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation," *The Liberty Centennial Campaign Coordinator's Handbook*, "The People's Campaign," The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, c. 1984. File: Statue of Liberty 1980-1985, NJR.

Commission chairman Lee Iacocca, speaking at the project's launch, called upon all Americans to take part in the rebuilding of "these symbols of our heritage," which would result in "a great renaissance of spirit across the land." He appealed especially to those descendants of Europeans who had passed through Ellis Island during the early 20th-century immigration wave. The heritage Iacocca spoke of extended "back through the entry gates of Ellis Island – back across the Atlantic to England and Ireland, to France and Germany, to Spain and Italy, to all of the countries of Europe and beyond." He spoke about his own parents, who had made the trip from Italy to sail past the Statue of Liberty.⁶³

Iacocca, who had been appointed by Reagan, was not just an Italian-American but testament to "individual enterprise." The president of Chrysler, Iacocca was a familiar face to households across the nation, having come into their living rooms as the star of his automobile company's commercials. In a crusade to rescue the industry, Iacocca enveloped the Chrysler image in a blanket of patriotism, featuring the American flag in any and every promotion.⁶⁴ At the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Commission launch, Iacocca summoned the public with a call to patriotism. "There are a lot of us who are ready to make 'made in America' mean something again! We believe that individual enterprise is a means of providing expanded opportunities for all people." While Sinatra had talent to propel him into the spotlight, Iacocca had American ambition, which he avidly applied to fundraising.

Though Ellis Island had just as much at stake in the fundraising, the foundation's campaign emphasized the Statue of Liberty, the more marketable of the two monuments. An early market survey had showed the recognition factor for the Statue of Liberty to be 75 percent, compared to only 20 percent for the immigration station at Ellis Island. Fundraising would be

⁶³ Lee A. Iacocca, Remarks on Centennial Commission's Project Launch, September 16, 1982, New York, NY. File: Statue of Liberty 1980-1985, NJR.

⁶⁴ Troy, *Morning in America*, 132.

spread out in three-year campaign, and it remained unknown whether Ellis Island could ever reach the status of its adjoining torch-bearing neighbor. Though complaints were made that Lady Liberty was being favored, the National Park Service maintained that both were equally publicized. Some donors, including Brooke Astor of the Vincent Astor Foundation, specified their donation go to Ellis Island.⁶⁵

Because Ellis Island did not have the same storied symbolism as the Statue of Liberty, the foundation had to create an image for it. The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation's "Liberty Centennial Campaign Coordinator's Handbook" asked readers to "consider what Ellis Island stands for in American life." It then listed such patriotic platitudes as "uncommon human courage," "individual opportunity," "energy, vitality and hard work," and "tolerance for ethnic and cultural diversity." The foundation planned to make Ellis Island a museum, documenting the immigrants' experience there, emphasizing "the cultural and ethnic heritage of America," and representing those "diverse groups who came through Ellis Island as well as other ports of entry." It also endeavored to show the influence the immigrants had once they settled, either in language, food, traditions, or special contributions made "that changed the face of America."⁶⁶ The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation adopted a trademark slogan for Ellis Island, "Remember the Dream," because "dreams brought homeless immigrants to Ellis Island and dreams shaped America."⁶⁷ The dream theme was vaguely reminiscent of Reagan's "We Share the Same Dream" campaign in 1980.

⁶⁵ Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady*, 80-81. The statue's restoration was expected to cost about \$29 million. Ellis Island, bigger and in need of more attention, would cost \$138 million. \$20 million was budgeted for future maintenance costs for both islands, and \$43 million went toward the commission's administrative costs, fundraising, and two years of celebrations. "Remember The Dream," *Liberty ... Keep The Torch Lit*, Winter 1986. File: Statue of Liberty 1980-1985, NJR.

⁶⁶ The Liberty Centennial Campaign Coordinator's Handbook, "The People's Campaign," The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, c. 1984. STLI 1986.

⁶⁷

Fundraising in the classroom was seen as an opportunity to instill in students an American set of values and a new image of Ellis Island. Just as French and American schoolchildren contributed to the building of the statue and its pedestal in the 1880s, the Commission sought to involve the schoolchildren of the 1980s. Iacocca urged students to get involved in fundraising by establishing “Save the Statue” committees in their classrooms and organizing successful endeavors such as car washes, cleanup days, read-a-thons, bake sales, and used toy and book sales. The National Education Advisory Committee saw the project as a “rare opportunity to awaken a broader and deeper understanding by our young people ... of American values symbolized by the Statue and the Island.” To fully understand the promise of America, the students needed to gain:

Awareness of the *linkage* between the Statue of Liberty, whose torch is raised as a welcoming beacon at the doorway of a nation born in the struggle for liberty and ever since dedicated to opposing tyranny, and Ellis Island, where millions took their first steps toward becoming Americans, is necessary to a full understanding of the promise of America.

According to this committee, Americans were “seeking a reaffirmation – ‘beyond the melting pot’ – of their special identities.” The campaign would provide a learning experience so “these national symbols of our precious heritage of freedom” would be better understood, “even by those who have experienced great difficulty in achieving that heritage.”⁶⁸ The last part was a meek attempt at putting the nation’s not-so-shining moments in history under an umbrella of greater glory. As festivities climaxed, detractors of the centennial commemorations would later point these omissions out.

In 1981, the NPS had published a general management plan for the national monument, with focus of effort on Ellis Island. The Park Service contended that the island’s designation as a

⁶⁸ Lee A. Iacocca, “Lady Liberty Needs You!” and “Statement of Support by the National Education Advisory Committee,” in Liberty Centennial Student Campaign Manuel. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

monument within its system “confirmed its status as a nationally significant historic site and directed future use of the island toward preservation and enhancement of its historical values.” The plan listed what restoration would be preferred or considered as an alternative for the different groupings of buildings. For example, the preferred plan for the main hospital complex, ferry building, and corridors was to correct the deteriorated and unsafe conditions and prevent further rot, but not allow any further development for indoor programs. An alternative plan offered the preservation and use of the buildings for expanded interpretive programs, office space and work areas for the American Museum of Immigration, and exhibition and office space for private nonprofit ethnic organizations. The third alternative was an echo of the original Philip Johnson plan – to not provide any stabilization but instead allow the buildings to deteriorate. The alternative concepts kept in mind the importance of presenting to visitors a full, accurate picture of the immigrant’s experience. This no expenses, no-action plan was the preferred alternative for the other structures on the island.⁶⁹

The Great Hall would undergo a restoration to be completed by its own centennial in 1992, while the future of the rest of the island’s buildings remained still undetermined. Sammartino advocated the removal of any minor building with no historical significance. Historians John Higham and Rudolph Vecoli favored a broad interpretation, wanting the nation’s history to shift from Plymouth Rock to Ellis Island, which they saw as a “legatee of all groups of immigrants.” August Bolino was an advocate of establishing an immigration research center on the island. One obstacle to fulfilling that realization lay in the fact that immigration documents and ethnic memorabilia were scattered across the country.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ National Park Service, “Summary of the Analysis of Alternatives for Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island,” January 1, 1981. File: Ellis Island 1980-1985, NJR.

⁷⁰ Bolino, *Ellis Island Source Book*, 81.

The National Park Service held a competition for proposal submissions, out of which came the winning \$60 million plan from the Center for Housing Partnerships for a conference center and 300-room hotel. The hotel, to be operated by the Sheraton Corporation, would be financed by a large bank loan, a federal grant, and \$18 million from private investors, who would receive tax credit for their contributions. The Park Service saw it as the best way to preserve its resources, limit new construction and generate revenue for the park. Iacocca vehemently opposed the proposal, which had won the approval of the Ellis Island Restoration Commission, New York and New Jersey Senators, and the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission. The chairman saw the plan as too commercial and a “tax break for the rich.”⁷¹

Iacocca wished to see the south side developed as an “ethnic Williamsburg,” a plan of the architect John Burgee. Its mainstay would be a large glass exhibition center between two groups of buildings, which would display ethnic group contributions and demonstrations of the crafts they brought with them.⁷² Critics dubbed the ethnic Williamsburg plot “Iacoccaland.”⁷³ Many at the Park Service, including preservationists, opposed the plan for its theme park associations.⁷⁴ It was to have a large focus on arts and crafts activity and demonstrations, such as the beer making brought over by the Germans.⁷⁵ The planning underwent a series of updates in attempts to please different commission members. Ultimately, the government declared the \$150 million proposal not financially feasible.

Other proposals included an Immigration and Naturalization Service plan to use the conference center for training; another suggested a \$13 million plan for talking mannequins to

⁷¹ Martin Gottlieb, “Restoring Ellis Island: Bitter Dispute Over the Future of a National Shrine,” *NYT*, February 23, 1986.

⁷² Gottlieb, “Restoring Ellis Island.”

⁷³ Tom Morganthau and Maggie Malone, “The Dream Endures,” 2.

⁷⁴ Martin Gottlieb, “Restoring Ellis Island: Bitter Dispute Over the Future of a National Shrine,” *NYT*, February 23, 1986.

⁷⁵ Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels and the Lady*, 147.

narrate the immigrant experience. Such talking mannequins were one of the highlights of Walt Disney World's Epcot Center, which had just previously opened in 1982. The theme park's nine-nation "World Showcase" featured the architectural, social and cultural heritages of China, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Italy, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. The United States pavilion, "The American Adventure," featured architectural imitations of Williamsburg, Independence Hall, Boston's Old State House, and Monticello. With Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain as hosts, the theater show gave a half-hour mixed media presentation of the nation's history, from the Pilgrims to the present time.⁷⁶ Historians and museum professionals were weary of such a glossy recounting of history, especially considering the contexts of Ellis Island's own shadowy past.

In all its celebration of what it is to be American, the planning could not escape political scandal. In early 1986, Interior Secretary Donald P. Hodel removed Iacocca as the chairman of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission, citing a conflict of interest in Iacocca's position as president of the fundraising Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation.⁷⁷ Following his dismissal, Iacocca accused the National Park Service of commercializing the statue. But Iacocca himself had been criticized for commercializing the monument in fundraising, so his arguments had little merit. With no plan yet endorsed, Hodel promised he would "not allow others to make a commercial mockery of the historic shrine that is Ellis

⁷⁶ Wendell Rawls Jr, "Close Encounters With Epcot," *NYT*, November 14, 1982. In 1988, three hundred members of the Museum Trustee Committee for Research and Development met in Florida to see what Disney World had to offer. The trustees, besides addressing collections, marketing, publicity, development, and legislation, met to discuss what they could learn about Disney magic and apply to their own museum industry. Walt Disney World's Epcot Center, called a "cultural complex of the future" was up for examination, an example of how to attract new audiences and not bore them. There were lessons to be learned from Epcot, which was keeping its guests entertained for averages of eight hours, whereas most North American museums held an hour-long retention rate. Allon Schoener, "Can Museums Learn From Mickey and Friends?" *NYT*, October 30, 1988.

⁷⁷ See National Park Historian Ross Holland's first-hand account in *Idealists, Scoundrels and the Lady*.

Island.”⁷⁸ The media portrayed corporate donations not as philanthropy, but exploitation. A *20/20* report revealed that Iacocca’s \$230 million fundraising goal was an arbitrary figure, only meant to represent a dollar contribution for every U.S. citizen. The report charged, “It would be the last nonpublic relations the citizenry would play in ‘saving’ the Statue of Liberty.” While the campaign had emphasized the participation of the American public, fundraisers approached potential participant companies with the chance “to make a lot of money.”⁷⁹

An American Celebration

In 1976, bicentennial celebrations were commemorations on the local level. But on Independence Day in 1986, the entire nation focused on New York Harbor. In the beginning stages of planning, the July 4th festivities were limited to a one-day affair, with the Op-Sail parade of tall ships in the morning and fireworks in the evening. That was before Lee Iacocca hired David L. Wolper.⁸⁰ Iacocca designated Wolper, the award-winning producer of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic games, as the chairman and producer of “Liberty Weekend ’86.” The international event had been seeped in American patriotic fervor and broadly embraced by the public, who lined the streets of the thirty-three states of the Olympic torch relay.⁸¹

Wolper’s career in production extended back to television, where he served most notably as the executive producer of the *Roots* miniseries. During filming, Wolper became close friends with author Alex Haley. Reflecting upon the 1970s in his memoir, *Producer*, he wrote, “Because we are a nation of immigrants, most Americans have moved farther away from their family roots

⁷⁸ “Hodel Vows ‘Tasteful’ Restoration of Ellis Island,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1986. STLI 1986.

⁷⁹ Steve Daley, “‘20/20’ revealed another Iacocca,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1986. STLI 1986.

⁸⁰ Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady*, 213.

⁸¹ Troy, *Morning in America*, 152-153.

than any other people in history. Few people even know the names of the immigrants in their family who risked their lives to come here.” Wolper credited *Roots* for starting “a genealogy craze.”⁸² The producer also thought himself an “old-fashioned patriot.” He saw the centennial as “a celebration of the core value that had made America great: the willingness to accept peoples from all over the world and give them the support they needed and the opportunities they craved to live a better life.” Liberty Weekend was going to be “a made-for America event.”⁸³ *Newsweek* declared, “There is something terribly American in the outsized – some would say outlandish – spectacle Wolper is concocting. But the Statue of Liberty, like that nation she has come to represent, symbolizes outsize dreams.”⁸⁴

In a more reflective presentation, New York City museums, libraries, and galleries prepared exhibits on all facets of Liberty, ranging from the symbolism of the statue itself to the history of the immigrants who had glorified it. Uptown on 76th Street, the New York Historical Society showcased three exhibits, “Statue of Liberty: America’s Symbol of Freedom in Souvenirs and Ephemera,” “Statue of Liberty: Fine Arts Centennial Celebration,” and “Liberty’s Legacy: Photographs of New York’s Ethnic Festivals,” which was comprised of 65 color photographs of nine city festivals. The New York Public Library featured Ellis Island immigration manuscripts and photographs. Other photography exhibits could be found at the Nikon House, the World Trade Center, and the International Center of Photography. The Metropolitan Museum of Art put the limelight on the architect of Liberty’s pedestal. Ten blocks up from the Met, the Jewish Museum featured a history of Jewish immigrants in America. Within the other boroughs, Staten Island’s Newhouse Gallery explored “New Liberty

⁸² David L. Wolper, *Producer: A Memoir*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 242.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁸⁴ Tom Morganthau and Maggie Malone, “The Dream Endures,” 6.

Monuments: Symbolizing Liberty Today” and the Bronx County Historical Society exhibited “The Ethnic Bronx: Study of Immigration Patterns.”⁸⁵

Liberty fever took on many shapes. In the centennial merchandise market, however, sales were “a total bust,” as one retailer described. Souvenir statue trinkets such as nail clippers, chocolates, T-shirts had little appeal. What did sell out, however, was a \$2.95 flip book showing Miss Liberty shedding her torch, tome, and gown, and diving into the waters of New York Harbor.⁸⁶ One original creation was a 60-pound sculpture of the statue, made completely of chopped liver, by Leo Steiner of the Carnegie Delicatessen. Titled “Chopped Liverty,” it was presented to Governor Mario Cuomo, who was having a birthday celebration of his own.⁸⁷

Cuomo, a Democrat known for his strong sense of Italian-American identity, was outspokenly critical of Reagan. “Not everyone is sharing in this city’s splendor and glory,” the governor said in his Democratic National Convention keynote address in 1984, responding to Reagan’s portrayal of the nation as a “shining city on a hill.” He deplored Reagan’s “survival of the fittest” approach to government. “We believe in encouraging the talented, but we believe that while survival of the fittest may be a good working description of the process of evolution, a

⁸⁵ “Immigration Exhibits at City Galleries,” *NYT*, March 1, 1986; and William R. Greer, “A Calendar of Liberty Events,” *NYT*, May 18, 1986; and “Weekender Guide” *NYT*, May 16, 1986.

⁸⁶ “Selling Liberty,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 1986. STLI 1986. That the statue was the subject of advertising was a phenomenon since the First World War, during when her image was attached to the sale of government bonds. By the 1950s, decades after immigration restrictions stopped the floods, “it was safe to enshrine [the immigrants] in a historical temple,” writes Vecoli. The commemorative efforts demonstrated a study in contrasts. In 1952, Representative Francis Walters, a leading advocate of immigration restriction, introduced a resolution designating October 28 as Statue of Liberty Day, to recognize the “welcoming beacon to the oppressed and persecuted of all lands and faiths.” Bartholdi, the Statue, and the motto “In God We Trust” were featured on 3-cent, 8-cent, and 11-cent stamps issued by the U.S. Post Office in 1954. Bedloe’s Island became Liberty Island. Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Huddled Masses: The Statue of Liberty as a Symbol of Immigration,” in *The Statue of Liberty Revisited*, eds. Eilton S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler, 58 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ William E. Geist, “About New York: from Jellybeans to Wigs, Liberty Season Is On,” *NYT*, June 18, 1986. STLI 1986.

government of humans should elevate itself to a higher order.” Nearing the end of his rousing speech, Cuomo credited his success to his parents. His father, an Italian immigrant, had come to the United States “uneducated, alone, unable to speak the language,” but taught him “faith and hard work by the simple eloquence of his example.” From his parents he learned of Americans’ obligations to each other. Cuomo sought a government like the one that had been there “to protect” his parents when they needed it.⁸⁸

The statue lit again, after years of being covered in scaffolding, was a proper image for the Reagan presidency that had unbound what it saw a nation laden with liberal policies. The dramatic ceremony on the opening night of Liberty Weekend, July 3, began with a single spotlight on the statue, then a reddish glow at the base. From the bottom-up, the statue was bathed in a blue light in the darkness, until completely lit and bathed in white. With the gold torch shining, “America the Beautiful” played for all to sing along. The president announced, “It’s just as American, and just as important, to have some fun. Now let’s have some fun. Let the celebration begin.”⁸⁹ In the words of historian Gil Troy, “Reagan wanted Americans to feel good, not think too hard.”⁹⁰ Lee Iacocca had introduced Reagan, saying, “He made it fashionable to be a patriot again.”⁹¹ Reagan had built on the legacies of Roosevelt and Kennedy, bringing to the White House a “brand of leadership” that “partially transcended day-to-day politics and

⁸⁸ Mario Cuomo, Keynote Speech, Democratic National Convention, San Francisco, July 17, 1984 in *In Our Own Words: Extraordinary Speeches of the American Century*, eds. Robert Torricelli and Andrew Carroll, 354-359 (New York: Kodansha America, 1999).

⁸⁹ *An ABCNews Presentation: Liberty Weekend: Commemorative Edition*. VHS. (New York: American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., 1986). Library at the Statue of Liberty National Monument. ABC had paid \$10 million for broadcasting privileges.

⁹⁰ Troy, *Morning in America*, 149.

⁹¹ *An ABCNews Presentation: Liberty Weekend*.

helped shape American culture.”⁹² His patriotism called for an American response to greatness, and the public openly responded.⁹³

Wolper’s patriotic spectacle saluted Reagan’s call for greatness. Independence Day festivities began with one of the largest peacetime navy flotillas in the nation’s history, named Operation Sail 1986. The 10-mile long assembly of 33 warships sailed past the Statue of Liberty in tribute, 21-gun salutes included. Reagan, French President Francois Mitterand, and their wives watched the windjammer parade (265 ships from 30 nations) from Governor’s Island, while hundreds of thousands of spectators lined the shores of the Hudson. There, they watched the nation’s largest aircraft carrier, as well as Coast Guard estimates of 20,000 private crafts, pass by.⁹⁴ The Boston Pops performed that afternoon in Liberty State Park, breaking a 55-year tradition of July 4th performances by the Charles River.⁹⁵ Conductor John Williams led the ensemble in an Americana Music Concert that featured stars John Denver, Johnny Cash, and Whitney Houston.⁹⁶ The 20-ton fireworks spectacular included computerized synchronization that linked the timing of the explosions with the music performed by the Marine Band. In 1886, the Marine Band, under the direction of John Phillip Sousa, had played at the original dedication of the Statue. In 1986, it played well-known songs from the native countries of Ellis Island immigrants. In the grand finale, Liberty Island glowed in the light of eight parachute flares and 90 silver shells fashioning a crown above the statue.⁹⁷

⁹² Troy, *Morning in America*, 11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁹⁴ Anthony F. Shannon, “Lady’s Day,” *Star-Ledger*, July 5, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

⁹⁵ Concert-goers won their tickets in a nationwide lottery, which had left some Jersey City residents and politicians feeling left out. Joe Battenfeld, “Lottery will decide who enjoys Liberty Park Concert,” *The Dispatch*, March 14, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

⁹⁶ Anthony F. Shannon, “A Salute That’s Tops of the Pops,” *Star-Ledger*, July 5, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

⁹⁷ “Fireworks,” *Star-Ledger*, July 5, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

Everything, it seemed, happened on the large scale, including nationwide naturalization ceremonies. Between July 2nd and the 4th, 25,000 people became naturalized citizens. Chief Justice Warren Burger swore in 250 on Ellis Island alone as part of the centennial celebration. These public commemorations were not unlike the ones conducted at the Liberty Park Ethnic Festival, as documented in the last chapter. The federal Immigration and Naturalization Service picked about 175 people from New York for the ceremony, and the governors of all 50 states, three U.S. territories, and the mayor of Washington, D.C. were each asked to send two prospective citizens. Burger also swore in thousands of immigrants in Miami, St. Louis, and San Francisco via television. The press highlighted the stories of these ordinary immigrants. One Sicilian man had moved to the United States twenty years beforehand and had taken part in the restoration effort.⁹⁸

The closing ceremonies, held at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, on July 5, were to rival, if not outmatch, the Olympic spectacle.⁹⁹ The show, in planning for a year, included 700 musicians, a 1,100-member choir, hundreds of dancers, renowned actors and singers, and sports celebrities. A 20-tier stage, flanked by two 16-foot wide waterfalls, occupied one end zone. Producers divided the show into three sections to correspond with the three themes of the weekend: Remember, Rejoice, and Renew. The first part, Remember, was a tribute to those who raised the money to repair the statue, those who worked on it, and to France. The governors of New York and New Jersey made small speeches. The second segment, Rejoice, was a vocal showpiece, featuring American idols in jazz, gospel, country, Hollywood, New

⁹⁸ Mitchell Landsberg, "A special welcome to our new citizens," *Star-Ledger*, July 1, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

⁹⁹ Tom Morganthau and Maggie Malone, "The Dream Endures," 16.

York, and rock 'n' roll. The final part of the extravaganza, titled Renew, featured Vice President George Bush and different actors and actresses delivering readings on liberty.¹⁰⁰

The Statue of Liberty's centennial had combined the usual pomp of Independence Day, with the melding of old and new American traditions. According to Don Mischer, the producer of the weekend's grand finale at Giants Stadium, the events over the first days of Liberty Weekend were meant to be "heavier ceremonial events, stately and dignified," whereas the closing ceremony was meant to be "an exuberant celebration ... fun and exciting."¹⁰¹ Some observers, however, saw little dignity in the weekend's exploits.

Liberty Weekend Interpretations

Officials invested \$10 million dollars into security for the event; twenty-seven law enforcement agencies collaborated on six months of planning that promised to prevent any threat to safety, short of a suicide mission. It was reported to be the largest peacetime security effort in the nation's history.¹⁰² Historian Mike Wallace, however, considered these measures to be a failure.

For all the rumors about possible Libyan terror attacks at the July 4th ceremonies in New York City to rededicate the Statue of Liberty, it was Ronald Reagan who, as it were, hijacked the statue, deploying its extraordinary popular appeal and symbolic potency in a campaign of narrow ideological self-justification.

¹⁰⁰ Tom Canavan, "Meadowlands fete to cap four days of festivities," *The Dispatch*, July 1, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Richard Esposito, "\$10 Million Security Blanket," *New York Newsday*, June 20, 1986. STLI Press Clippings 1986, Library at the Statue of Liberty National Monument. Law enforcement included: 22,000 of the city's 26,500 police officers, a fleet of patrol helicopters, 10 bomb-sniffing dogs, 31 harbor craft, a hostage team, counter-intelligence units, scuba divers, a FBI-NYPD Joint antiterrorist Task Force, and 30 naval vessels in the harbor.

Reagan's version of the immigrant experience was "an up-from-poverty saga of success, the achievement of a 'striving, God-fearing, self-reliant people.'" ¹⁰³ Wallace was one of the more outspoken critics of the political maneuverings behind Liberty Weekend. He lamented that even the mass media, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*, were "full of success sagas about recent immigrants who have 'made it.'" ¹⁰⁴ He insisted that "Reagan had three goals in mind: first, to legitimate various of his current policies; second, to refurbish a particular reading of the history of immigration; and third, to reawaken a Christian millenarian vision of America's manifest destiny." ¹⁰⁵ The commemorative ceremonies had not allowed for other interpretations of the immigrant story – only one of entrepreneurship and success.

Another commentator observed that the lighting of the statue and the "America" sing-a-long had been moving until the commercial break – for *Psycho III* – cut in. This *Washington Post* writer contended, "The Statue of Liberty, among all the others looking on from sea to shining sea, deserved better." He complained that the event had been designed as a television production, not just an event to be covered. The writer also dismissed the president's speech as another "heavily anecdotal, folksy-wolksy numbers, the kind of schmaltzy rouser that might have been included as a patriotic pick-me-up in a 1942 Warner Bros. production." ¹⁰⁶

The symbolism behind the national monuments had not been enough for event organizers. There existed a need to honor some actual people who embodied these ideals. With that, came the disputes. It began with David Wolper, who created the Medal of Liberty, which he described as a "new national honor," though it had no affiliation with the government. The

¹⁰³ Mike Wallace, "Ronald Reagan, Ellis Island, and the History of Immigration," *OAH Newsletter* (November 1986). STLI 1986.

¹⁰⁴ Mike Wallace, "Hijacking History: Ronald Reagan and the Statue of Liberty," *Radical History Review* 37 (January 1987): 130.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Shales, "Lights, Songs, Cheers – And Commercials: The Holiday Begins," *Washington Post*, July 4, 1986.

limited number of awardees, especially the fact that missing from the list were Irish, Italians and Poles (constituents of major ethnic groups) caused an uproar. In response, New York City Mayor Edward Koch honored 87 prominent Americans with his very own Mayor's Liberty Award. The Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation decided to create the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, awarded to a combination of prominent and relatively unknown citizens.¹⁰⁷

An article by the award-winning author and activist June Jordan in Long Island's *Newsday* captured what was missing from the popular Statue of Liberty narrative. In a tribute to her family, Jordan, the daughter of West Indian immigrants, wrote about her American experiences growing up in the 1940s in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, "It is a sad thing to consider that this country has given its least to those who have loved it the most ... the very word *immigrant* connotes somebody white; while *alien* denotes everybody else." Yet Jordan recalls her parents never evoking any disappointment with their nation, rather, they "would have wanted to say, 'Thanks, America!' if only there had been some way, some public recognition and welcome of their presence."¹⁰⁸ Jacobson encapsulates the debate of Ellis Island inclusiveness: "To celebrate this as a 'nation of immigrants,' to construct 'America' solely through the eyes of the incoming European steerage passenger, is not only to redraw a line around the exclusive white 'we' of 'we the people,' but simultaneously to claim inclusivity under the aegis of commonly held 'liberty.'¹⁰⁹

The centennial observers did not neglect to explore the meaning of liberty as France had originally bestowed upon the statue. In 1985, PBS aired the Ken Burns documentary *Statue of Liberty*. Narrated by historian David McCullough, the 50-minute film tracked the history of the

¹⁰⁷ "80 Named As Recipients of Ellis Island Awards," *NYT*, October 16, 1986. STLI 1986.

¹⁰⁸ June Jordan, "Thank You, America!" *Newsday*, June 29, 1986. STLI 1986. Later renamed "For My American Family: A Belated Tribute to a Legacy of Gifted Intelligence and Guts" in *Some of Us Did NOT Die: New and Selected Essays*, (Oxford: Basic Civitas Books, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

statue from its inception to its current state of restoration, while asking questions about liberty – “What is liberty?” and “What threatens liberty?” – to select speakers such as James Baldwin, the poet Carolyn Forché, director Milos Forman and writer Jerzy Kosinski. New York Governor Mario Cuomo was also a guest.¹¹⁰

In the documentary, Cuomo’s discussion of the statue connected it to the resounding idea of a modern day manifest destiny, one that sets the individual American up for greatness. “Symbols are important – and reminders of the essence of this country are very, very important, because the further we get away from our essence the deeper trouble we’re in. So, it’s good to have a great statue in our harbor saying this is why we came and let’s not forget it.” The governor relays a fictional interview between his mother and the immigration officials at Ellis Island as she arrived to join her husband, a ditch digger, in New Jersey. “What do you have?” Cuomo assumes they asked her, and, “What do you expect of this country, with the little you brought us?” To that, Cuomo says his mother replied, “Oh not much, just one thing. ... Before I die, I’d like one of my sons to be governor of the state of New York.” Cuomo’s immigrant success story was ubiquitous among ethnic politicians, who courted their audiences with images of both the ordinary and the extraordinary.¹¹¹

Another prominent Democrat, Tip O’Neill, took advantage of the press spotlight on ethnics, as Cuomo did, and connected his own heritage story with party politics. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, whose grandfather came from County Cork to Boston in 1846, recalled his family history to a reporter. He passed on the advice of his grandfather and father: “Do the best you can for your neighbor. Never forget from where you come, and see if you can

¹¹⁰ *Statue of Liberty*. VHS, dir. Ken Burns, Written by Bernard A. Weisberger and Geoffrey C. Ward, Narrated by David McCullough (1985; Public Broadcasting System).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

improve the lot of your fellow man.”¹¹² Even though O’Neill and Reagan were often at odds, their common Irish roots were a softening point. To share in a meal of Irish roots and bipartisanship, O’Neill invited the president for a St. Patrick’s Day luncheon of corned beef and cabbage. The White House Chief of Staff James Baker observed, “There’s real good chemistry as long as they’re swapping Irish jokes and not talking policy.”¹¹³

By the time Liberty’s actual anniversary came around in October, the nation had been partied out. In a quiet ceremony, Ellis Island Medals of Honor were presented to 56 people selected by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations, including Joe DiMaggio, Donald Trump, Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Anita Bryant, and Muhammad Ali. The awardees received their medals on Ellis Island, and were celebrated formally at the Waldorf-Astoria in the evening, with a five-foot blue and red cake lit with 100 candles, and sliced by Bob Hope. The last event of the centennial was the sealing of a time capsule, including tape-recorded oral histories from immigrants, Liberty Weekend video highlights, messages from Hodel and Reagan, centennial memorabilia and a “Take Pride in America” pin.¹¹⁴ These glossy artifacts demonstrated how the weekend, and much of the Reagan presidency, made a grand storyline of the nation’s history.

The End of the Lady Liberty Affair

When Ellis Island’s newly restored Great Hall opened in 1990, two years in advance of its own centennial, it had emerged distinct in design from the glamour of Liberty Weekend. It did, however, have some sparkle. A local newspaper proudly recounted that the main hall’s copper domes, which had been “designed to impress the immigrants with the wealth and the promise of America,” now “gleam as brightly as they did at the turn of the century.” Inside,

¹¹² Jerry Schwartz, “Tip O’Neill recalls family’s history” *The Dispatch*, July 1, 1986. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

¹¹³ Hedrick Smith, “Reagan and O’Neill, Each One Needs the Other,” *NYT*, March 17, 1983.

¹¹⁴ “Quiet Ceremony Marks Miss Liberty’s Birthday,” *NYT*, October 29, 1986. STLI 1986.

“Chandeliers sparkle, and benches where nervous greenhorns once waited have been buffed to a high gloss.” The editorial reminded its readers that the nation was encountering “another great age of immigration.” Immigrants from Colombia, Korea, Vietnam, India, and Nigeria were bringing with them the “same dreams, and the same determination that shines on the faces in the black-and-white photos on display in the new museum.” There was a universal message to be found – to dream “as those who passed through Ellis Island.”¹¹⁵ There again was that image of dreaming, of common aspirations that Reagan and the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation ad promoted.

On September 10, 1990, the Great Hall was rededicated as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum after a six-year, \$156 million restoration effort. Vice President Dan Quayle called it “a symbol of freedom and peace.” Joined him were Lee Iacocca, six immigrants who had been processed on the island, and 1,500 guests who contributed artifacts, oral testimonies and funds for the ceremonies. On its first day, the island received more than 8,000 visitors.¹¹⁶ More than a month after its reopening, Ellis Island welcomed crowds of 7,500 visitors on weekdays and 12,500s on the weekends. Park officials had overestimated the capacity limits of the museum. Faulty reasoning was to blame for their original estimates, which had been based on the Main Hall’s processing numbers at the turn of the century. (11,747 immigrants were processed on the peak day of immigration – April 17, 1907).¹¹⁷ Though the museum hoped to replicate the immigrant experience at the processing center, it did not want its visitors to be packed in and crowded as their forebears had been.

¹¹⁵ Editorial, “New Role For Ellis Island,” *The Record*, September 7, 1990. Folder: Ellis Island 1990, Zapp Papers.

¹¹⁶ Valerie Hanley, “Ellis Island rededicated,” *Jersey City Reporter*, September 16, 1990. Folder: Ellis Island 1990, Zapp Papers.

¹¹⁷ Al Frank, “Mass of Problems: Park Service Alarmed By Large Crowds,” *Star-Ledger*, October 28, 1990. Folder: Ellis Island 1990, Zapp Papers.

The popularity of Ellis Island shows the success of the 1980 campaign to transform its image in the public's mind. The National Park Service at first protested President Johnson's 1965 annexation of the island to the Statue of Liberty National Monument. Superintendent David L. Moffitt said the NPS had originally assessed that Ellis Island "did not meet the criteria for a National Park because it was only of local or regional significance." Speaking with almost 20 years hindsight in 1983, Moffitt said that he "couldn't visualize how such a thing could have happened," for he now considered Ellis Island "the most important historical site in this country."¹¹⁸ The thousands of people riding the ferry to the old immigration depot indicated that the nation was still seeped in an atmosphere of remembrance and identity affirmation.

The Ellis Island Immigration Museum's initial five exhibition areas did a thorough job of explaining the island experience. Overall, historian Judith Smith (who reviewed the exhibits) was impressed by their breadth, calling the museum a demonstration of how "the new social history in the 1970s and 1980s has profoundly reshaped the study of immigration."¹¹⁹ Immigration study, in turn, had affected the presentation of American history. As *Newsweek* recalled during Liberty Weekend, "The statue became as important to [the immigrants] as the log cabin or cover wagon had been to the English, Irish, and Germans who came before them; she symbolized their journey and their struggle to adapt."¹²⁰ The Statue of Liberty immigrant narrative was taking on a greater role in the nation's narrative.

The arrival drama was told in the Charles Guggenheim film "Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears" through the use of historic footage and stills, combined with narration by Gene Hackman and recorded reminiscences by various Ellis Island immigrants. The Department of the Interior

¹¹⁸ Elliot Willensky, "A Nation Finally Remembers," *Historic Preservation*, July/August 1983. File: Statue of Liberty-Centennial Celebration 1986, NJR.

¹¹⁹ Judith Smith, Exhibition Review, "Celebration Immigration History at Ellis Island," *American Quarterly*, 44:1 (March 22, 1990): 82-100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713181> (accessed April 1, 2008).

¹²⁰ Tom Morganthau and Maggie Malone, "The Dream Endures," 18.

wanted to shorten the film's title to "Isle of Hope," but historical consultants rejected the optimistic focus in favor of a more "nuanced" – and historically accurate – interpretation. The exhibit, "Through America's Gate" took visitors through the dramatic steps of passing the inspection process and making it through Ellis Island's gate, including medical and legal inspections.¹²¹ Its focus on *entry*, Smith pointed out, provided no background about why the immigrants left their native lands, explanations for why they were coming, what they were coming to, or where they were going. Across the river in the Lower East Side, a museum was being created to fill the voids. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum is the final chapter in this survey of the arching changes in public memory in the 1980s.

¹²¹ The other exhibits: "Peak Immigration Years" presented the origins and development of immigrant communities in the United States from 1880 to 1924; "Ellis Island Chronicles" gave an overview of the island's history; "Silent Voices" showed the years the immigration station had been abandoned; "Restoring a Landmark" displayed the restoration process; and "Treasures from home" featured different objects people brought with them on their voyage.

– CHAPTER THREE –

The Newest National Shrine: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum

“For a Nation of Immigrants, there is no more important historic site in our country than the Lower East Side. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum was established in 1984 to preserve and interpret this vital legacy that we, all of us, may know who we are.”

— The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 1991¹

The American Institute of Architects published a revised version of its *Guide to New York City* in 1979. Introducing the Lower East Side, the authors, Elliot Wilensky and Norval White, noted that the neighborhood was “far more important historically than architecturally,” for it was home to the tenement buildings that housed immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. The widespread tenements covered 90 percent of lots in the neighborhood. The authors, however, promised to reveal to the reader the “landmarks” of the community, as well as point out the plethora of synagogues – the “significant building type” – along the way. The nine pages dedicated to the Lower East Side in the 547-page guide pointed out notable locations such as the Congregation K’hal Adath Jeshurun (the synagogue on Eldridge Street), Seward Park, a few prominent churches, the Williamsburg Bridge, Henry Street Settlement, and pockets of street undisturbed by urban renewal. Despite the ethnic changes in the neighborhood, one could still find the Sunday marketplace on Orchard Street, a combination of traditional “bazaar trading practices, plain pipe merchandising, and low prices for brand name goods” with “some tacky (and some upscale) names and glitzy storefronts.”² This chapter explores the Lower East Side in

¹ Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Spring/Summer Program Schedule, 1991. RG 5.1, Box 2, Lower East Side Tenement Museum Archives. New York, N.Y. (hereafter cited as LESTM).

² Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, Revised ed. (New York: Collier Books: 1978), 50-59.

the following decade and explains how one of those ubiquitous tenements became *the* destination for tourists seeking history and a meaning to that history.

Now a distant memory was the rights-consciousness of the 1960s that had ultimately led to President Johnson declaring the United States a “nation of nations” and opening the long-closed immigrant portal. In the years leading to 1965, White House estimates had tried to assure blue-collar Americans afraid of immigrant influxes that the current ethnic mix would not be disturbed.³ Signing the Immigration Act into legislation, Johnson assured the public that it was “not a revolutionary bill.” Nonetheless, the numbers of new immigrants consequently skyrocketed, from 400,000 annually in the bill’s first years of action, to 800,000 by the late 1970s, and averaging 700,000 in the 1980s.⁴ Historian Roger Daniels has argued that if Congress had had the foresight to see the consequences of the 1965 legislation, it would have never passed the Act.⁵

Amid these changes came a backlash against liberal immigration policy by the 1970s and the 1980s. Opponents argued that newcomers were crowding classrooms and hospitals, burdening state and local governments, evading taxes, and draining welfare. Moreover, these new ethnics were taking over neighborhoods, making their own enclaves as had generations before.⁶ Reagan-esque views of the poor and struggling did not help their cause. The president was seen to be without sympathy for the downtrodden, believing that “the poor deserved and even desired their own misery.”⁷ Although these neo-nativist reactions bore striking similarity to those raised in the early part of the century against immigrants, most Americans did not perceive

³ Steven M. Gillon, *That’s Not What We Meant to Do* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), 168.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

⁵ Roger Daniels in Gillon, 199.

⁶ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 296.

⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 235.

this parallel. Thus the stage was set for Ruth Abram to found the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and to make history applicable to the present.

This chapter will examine the development of the Tenement Museum, in context, and its effect on public memory of Lower East Side immigrant life. From lowly tenement to national historic site, the museum interprets the lives of its former ethnic tenants, and calls itself home to all Americans with immigrant backgrounds. With the vision of Ruth J. Abram, the museum has widened the storied tale of the Jewish-American memory in the Lower East Side to encompass all – the free African-Americans, the Germans, the Irish, the Italians – who passed through. Through its focus on interpretation of the past and learning from history, the museum made connections between the immigrants of the old world and present-day 20th-century immigrants – the Chinese, the Puerto Ricans. Whereas ethnic festivals “abound each summer like dandelions in the spring,” wrote the *Star-Ledger*, they did not lead to any deeper understanding. Abram was not concerned so much with celebration as she was with investigation and interpretation.⁸

Founded in the latter part of the 1980s, the Tenement Museum may appear to be disconnected from the roots-driven developments of the previous decades. The museum, however, emerged as a continuation of the need for identification and location, simultaneously signaling a turning point in the pluralist focus of Americanism. The museum’s design maintained the same nationality-by-nationality approach as seen in the Liberty Park Festival. Its message differed in the sense that the storylines it presented were not nationality-specific. There was no celebration of specific contributions, but inherently there remained celebration in the idea of perseverance through hardships. Liberty Weekend had celebrated a generalized ideal of those immigrants who had “made it” and consequently had made their contributions to the nation. The Tenement Museum paid tribute to their struggle, before they moved up and out of tenement

⁸ Mark Finston, “Huddled Masses,” *Star-Ledger*, July 17 1989. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

squalor. Its permanent exhibits showed lives that were riddled with imperfections and hardships, which succeeded out of determination and the help of others.

The museum's own roots emerged from the social history movement established in the 1960s, and which demanded attention to those downtrodden in history. A new generation of historians, inspired by the New Left and liberation movements sought to record experiences of the "inarticulate, the powerless, the subaltern elements in American history; to understand the consciousness of workers, immigrants, women, blacks; to perceive the world through their eyes; to interpret their behavior through their values."⁹ The various players involved in designing the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, labeled an "everyman's museum," had sought to encompass a similar appeal. The Tenement Museum materialized at approximately the same time social historians and curators were dedicating new spaces to other social causes, such as the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and the National Civil Rights Museum.¹⁰

Ethnic studies that emerged from the social movement gained government legitimacy through the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act of 1972, which acknowledged "in a multi-ethnic society a greater understanding of the contributors of one's own heritage and those of one's fellow citizens can contribute to a more harmonious, patriotic, and committed populace."¹¹ To create a better understanding of one's neighbor was one goal of the New Jersey Liberty Festival. Although funding appropriated for the act was modest in the beginning, they ceased entirely during the Reagan administration.¹² In last chapter's examination of Liberty Weekend, it was

⁹ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot: Ethnicity in the United States in the Eighties," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5:1 (Fall 1985):13.

¹⁰ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 638.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 616.

¹² Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot," 13.

apparent that Reagan rejected the pluralist view of American society, opting instead for a return to a nation united under a common identity.

In explaining the void she perceived in the immigrant narrative, Ruth Abram pointed to the attention Ellis Island had garnered in recent years. What she saw missing was the story of what happened to the immigrants after the immigration depot.¹³ “We have inadvertently destroyed a whole memory,” she has said, with most Americans tending to try to forget the crowded tenement was the only way of life afforded to many immigrants.¹⁴

Although the tenement is preserved as it was in different decades over a century ago, it is not a static place. Unlike Ellis Island, the Lower East Side was never completely abandoned. Rather, it was, and has continued to be, a neighborhood of immigrants. As the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island have remained important locators in the nation’s immigrant mythology, the Lower East Side has maintained its ethnic character, even as gentrification has transformed the neighborhood.

The Lower East Side in American Memory

About one mile northeast of Ellis Island is the Lower East Side. To the south it is bordered by Fulton and Franklin Streets, to the north by Fourteenth Street. It extends from the East River west to Pearl Street and Broadway. It is one of the few areas in Manhattan that has escaped developers’ demolition squads through the century.

For historian Max Page, who has documented New York’s slum clearance movement, the Lower East Side’s importance as a place of memory outgrew its importance as a living neighborhood by the end of the Depression. Although the Lower East Side, known as the “foul

¹³ Mark Finston, “Huddled Masses,” *Star-Ledger*, July 17, 1989. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

¹⁴ “Tenement Museum: The Immigrant Experience in New York,” *Preservation League of New York State Newsletter*, Winter 1988. Box 1, RG 6.2: LESTM Publicity, Press Clippings 1984-1991, LESTM.

core” of New York’s slums, was not the first to be targeted, it was a prime candidate for the city’s campaigns that brought urban “renewal through destruction.” The rapid construction boom of the 1920s, combined with the steep decline in population during the Great Depression (from a high of 530,000 to 250,000 in 1930), left many landlords with property that needed attention.¹⁵ Renewal efforts produced the widening of Allen Street and the creation of Sara Delano Roosevelt Park (between Chrystie and Forsyth streets), where the president had made his visit on the same day of the Statue of Liberty’s 50th anniversary.

The destruction of tenement life memory began as early as the immigrants themselves started to move away from the Lower East Side. Artists and authors memorialized the immigrant experience. Michael Gold, author of *Jews Without Money* (1930), recognized the significance of the tenement as an initiation to American life, calling each tenement “a Plymouth Rock.”¹⁶ Others remembered the area as the home to the city’s founders, including James De Lancey, Henry Rutgers, and Theodore Roosevelt. With such a past, they argued it “worthy of a better future to redeem an appalling present.” Proponents of slum house clearing immediately dismissed the romanticized visions of the life. One voice was urban renewal expert Robert Moses, who, in 1956 speaking at the United Settlement House’s seventieth anniversary, called the tenements the “chief cause of urban disease and decay.” It was Moses’s dream to eradicate all tenements, and he scoffed at the suggestion that the very conditions of the tenements – their high volume and communal life – could produce great artists.¹⁷

The Lower East Side, historically and culturally, has been understood as the epicenter of Jewish American memory. The historian Hasia Diner explores this connection in her book *Lower East Side Memories*. Diner writes, “No other ethnic groups in America (with the exception of the

¹⁵ Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 100.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

African-American construction of Harlem) has so thoroughly understood, imagined, and represented itself through a particular chunk of space.” There is only one Lower East Side. It acts as a vehicle of remembrance and understanding, where the stories of Jewish Americans take place. The ubiquitous Little Italys and Chinatowns in cities around the nation have not been able to capture that singular identity.¹⁸

By the late 1960s, Jewish Americans had firmly established the Lower East Side as their “Old World.”¹⁹ By then, the neighborhood had already been going through rapid changes. In 1966, the city’s Jewish Museum opened an exhibit titled “The Lower East Side: Portal to American Life (1870-1924).” Curator Allon Schoener used sounds, images, and texts to recreate the immigrant ghetto in a publicly and critically acclaimed program.²⁰ The exhibition’s book explained, “Landing places – Plymouth, Jamestown, New Amsterdam, Philadelphia – symbolize American history. ... during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the first quarter of the twentieth century, New York’s Lower East Side was the first America for millions of immigrants.” Schoener, over 20 years earlier, was making the same analogies the Tenement Museum sought to embrace in its conception. “These miserable old tenements have been inherited by Puerto Ricans – New York’s newest immigrants,” he wrote. “Their lives are not so different from the lives of Eastern Europeans Jews of sixty years ago.”²¹ The ethnic composition of the neighborhood had shifted, as it had through history; unfortunately, the conditions had not significantly improved.

¹⁸ Hasia Diner, *Lower East Side Memories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 50.

¹⁹ Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, 176. For a detailed history of the transformation of the neighborhood, see Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

²⁰ Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University, 1999), 22.

²¹ Allon Schoener, *Portal to America: The Lower East Side 1870-1925* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), Introduction.

Calling the Jewish Museum's exhibit "long overdue," one *Times* critic suggested, "Any New Yorker who can trace his lineage back to Ellis Island ... should take his children to the museum to show them the land of their fathers."²² Schoener himself experienced the neighborhood for the first time when he came to New York to curate the exhibit. The opportunity led him to Delancey and Second Avenue, visiting the Old World he imagined his parents to have known, "eating food that [his] mother had never cooked and trying to find the world of [his] father's youth."²³

The Jewish Museum's exhibit would also lead one journalist to wander through the neighborhood, "in search not of nostalgia but of some relation between that past and this present." The Jewish culture represented in the museum was still visible on the streets, for the Jewish contingent made up more than a quarter of the population. Orchard Street on a Sunday morning was "still a carnival," bustling with bargain hunters and salesmen. But the space was now being shared with a growing number of Chinese immigrants. Both Chinese and Jewish immigrants had benefited from the 1965 Immigration Bill. The neighborhood also experienced an influx young people, searching for low-rent apartments and the thrills of the Village, pushing to transform the upper end of the Lower East Side into an "East Village" of "hippiness, sexual adventurousness, jazz joints, underground movie houses" for rents of \$40 or \$50 a month (five times less than an apartment uptown). Ultimately, when compared to the scene here fifty or sixty years ago, the Lower East Side was "still an ethnic mishmash, still a center for cultural experimentation and social uplift."²⁴

That "ethnic mishmash," the Lower East Side, had never held on to one nationality for too long during the immigration waves of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Even the majority of its

²² Richard F. Shepard, "Jewish Museum Depicts A Ghetto," *NYT*, September 21, 1966.

²³ Schoener, *Portal to America*, Preface.

²⁴ Harvey Swados, "A Sentimental Journey To the Lower East Side," *NYT*, September 18, 1966.

Jewish residents had migrated out of those blocks of tenements by the First World War. Its living conditions may have been anything but welcoming, but the continual flow of new residents, a new ethnicity in place every decade or so, may have contributed to the area's amicable environment and warm place in memory. In the 1960s, the neighborhood was 60 percent Puerto Rican and 20 percent black, in addition to the expanding numbers of Chinese residents. A two-day festival commemorating the Henry Street Settlement's seventy-fifth anniversary showcased the neighborhood's diversity. Henry Street, one of the nation's oldest and most influential settlement houses, had been founded in 1893. That festival became a neighborhood tradition, and in its third year of celebration it was supported by forty neighborhood and city agencies. The street party highlighted the ethnic diversity and amicability in the neighborhood, featuring a 30-foot long papier-mâché Chinese dragon and the food of locals, a smorgasbord of soul food, egg rolls and hotdogs. The event also addressed problems in the community, from narcotics addictions, to lead poisoning in the old tenements.²⁵ The neighborhood had retained its ghetto qualities through the decades, and was the subject of much attention in the urban renewal movements of the period.²⁶

The urban social movement had its legitimate successes; however, the liberal policies were to change in the 1970s. The 1970s represented the nadir for New York, with the city near bankruptcy, crime rampant, and the homeless crowding the streets. The Bronx was burning and the Son of Sam was a looming terror. By the decade's end, Christopher Mele writes, "the pendulum of institutional politics had swung away from community-based development and

²⁵ Nancy Moran, "Fiesta In Henry Street Blends Three Ethnic Groups," *NYT*, August 27, 1970. "Fete to Mark Henry Street Settlement's 75th Birthday," *NYT*, August 27, 1968.

²⁶ In late 1961, Mayor Robert F. Wagner announced a renewal project for the Lower East Side, titled "Operation Bowery." Four years later, the city announced the Seward Park Extension Urban Renewal plan (a site bounded by Essex, Grand, Willett and Delancey Streets), a culmination of 10 years effort. In 1965, of the 151 buildings in the area, the city listed 139 as deteriorating or dilapidated. Emanuel Perlmutter, "Bowery Clean-Up Planned," *NYT*, October 31, 1961. Charles G. Bennet, "Renewal is Voted in East Side Area," *NYT*, July 23, 1965. Samuel Kaplan, "Renewal Project Urged For East Side," *NYT*, April 20, 1965.

citizen reform coalitions and fully toward incentives for private commercial and residential development.”²⁷ The Lower East Side real estate, with its prime Manhattan location, existed in a tug-of-war between developers and residents. Urban reconstruction called for the evaluation of the uses of residential and commercial spaces, which often threatened poor residents with displacement. These residents included the working-class and ethnic and racial minority renters, the people who had been native to the area since the first waves of immigration. Conversely, in times of urban decline, investors lost interest in neighborhoods, residents would leave, and owners abandoned their houses.²⁸

Mayor Edward Koch, elected in 1978, encouraged the new office construction, which was part of his belief that the work of economic affairs was best performed by the private sector. Koch had left behind his New Deal associations for more conservative thinking. The mayor, a dominant leader of the Democratic Party, became one of the most popular men in office since LaGuardia (except in the black community) by reaching out to old, white ethnic groups. The construction – jumping from 10 office buildings between 1976-1980, to 47 in the next five years – signaled a fiscal recovery.²⁹ The former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan would later commend Koch for giving “New York City back its morale.”³⁰ Throughout Manhattan in the early 1980s, office towers and luxury housing shot up. Developers converted middle-class housing into owner-occupied condominiums and cooperatives. The housing market tightened, and eyes turned toward the less-developed sections of the city, such as the Lower East Side. It eventually would be the last low-income residential enclave south of 96th Street.³¹

²⁷ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ Jewel Bellush, “Clusters of Power: Interest Groups,” in *Urban Politics New York Style*, eds. Bellush and Dick Netzer (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 318-319.

³⁰ Pete Hamill, “Ed Koch’s Legacy,” *Gotham Gazette*, November 14, 2005, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article//20051114/202/1652> (accessed March 22, 2008).

³¹ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 222-224.

The Municipal Art Society had lamented the familiar loss of such buildings in its 1963 book *New York Landmarks*. Through its thoroughly post-modern lens, it observed, “Nostalgia is the share of the old New Yorker when he walks through the streets and sees in fond memory some vanished church or residence as he stares blankly into the large plate-glass window of today's skyscraper.” Such a skyscraper could occupy a single block, which had once been divided into 25 lots. The society, founded in 1892, dedicated itself to conserving the best of the past, recognizing the best of the present, and encouraging the best possible future planning. It saw the past as an active force for the present, with the belief that “pride in our heritage and the breadth of understanding it should give us” would produce “a wider and happier nation.”³²

Taking Back the Neighborhood

In the Lower East Side, a small congregation had held on to the crumbling Eldridge Street Synagogue through the years, worshiping in the basement, not willing to sell to developers. They formed the group The Eldridge Street Project to spearhead restoration efforts of their building, erected in 1897. The group sought funds from all over the city, gaining the support of the Astor Foundation, the Kaplan Fund (a pioneer in preservation philanthropy), as well as the Reichmann brothers (the owners of the Olympia & York development company), and James Wolfensohn, an investment banker. At about the same time, in 1984, Ruth Abram came to work with the group in the Lower East Side, and the Eldridge Street Project became the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy. The press hailed the conservancy's efforts. The restoration of the synagogue would “rescue from oblivion a vital era in American Jewish history,” wrote *The Jewish Press*.³³ The restoration of the synagogue, with its Romanesque, Gothic and Moorish

³² Alan Burnham, *New York Landmarks* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 11-12.

³³ Julius Liebb, “A New Look At The Lower East Side of Yesteryear,” *The Jewish Press*, February 27 1987. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

elements, represented, what the *Times* called, a “stunning rebuke to the cash-in-your-landmark philosophy.”³⁴

The conservancy sought to resurrect the Jewish world that had once existed there, now mostly a memory. This mission included the preservation and restoration of buildings important to Jewish life.³⁵ The Conservancy wanted people to see the synagogue not only as a testament to the Jewish immigrant experience but as “a reminder of the larger and continuing flow of immigrants through the Lower East Side.” The synagogue became “a symbol of immigrant hopes and dreams, of the aspirations of an entire people coming to the United States and settling on the Lower East Side.”³⁶ It was a narrative with a universal appeal, claiming that no matter the nationality, the experiences shared had been the same.

Abram had grown up in Atlanta, far from the Lower East Side. Her ancestry, however, shared in the tradition of the place. Her grandfather had migrated to Georgia from Rumania when he was young, never learning to read or write English, but opening up a store there. For his store, he would make occasional trips to the Lower East Side to purchase clothing wholesale. As Abram imagines it, those trips were an opportunity for her grandfather to connect with the way of life he left in Rumania – the chance to speak Yiddish and to enjoy the foods of his past, from which he was disconnected in his new home state.³⁷ Her story is not unlike those of many American Jews. When Americans began to recognize their roots in the 1960s and 1970s, many historians followed suite, turning to the study of their own immigrant backgrounds. Most were able to approach their subjects “with empathy and insight,” noted Rudolph Vecoli in 1985. He

³⁴ Paul Goldberger, “Two Gestures of Faith in Religious Landmarks of a Community,” *NYT*, September 28, 1986.

³⁵ “Manhattan Profile/Ruth J. Abram,” *Newsday*, June 30, 1988. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

³⁶ Paul Goldberger, “Two Gestures of Faith in Religious Landmarks of a Community,” *NYT*, September 28, 1986.

³⁷ Ruth Abram, “A Museum Grew In Me,” *Horizons of Culture and Life*, Summer 2001.

named this “rapprochement between ethnic academics and ethnic publics” to be one of the accomplishments of pluralist history.³⁸

Abram, however, was not first an historian, nor did she come to the museum profession solely for preservation’s sake. In her autobiographical essay “A Museum Grew In Me,” Abram spoke to the injustices, both ethnic and racial, that she witnessed and experienced growing up in Atlanta, Georgia. She received a degree in social welfare from Brandeis University.³⁹ Leading the national clearing house on women’s issues, she organized the *National Women’s Agenda*, a political agenda and national organization of women’s groups, including the Institute on Women’s History that helped establish the Women’s History Project. As an organizer, she authored *Send Us a Lady Physician: Women Doctors in America*. Her poetry appeared in *Poetry Magazine* and *Midwest Poetry Review*. Abram had also served as Program Director for the American Civil Liberties Union, Executive Director of the Norman Foundation, and Title VII Coordinator for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.⁴⁰ Abram was asking herself, “How can we form one nation, yet still appreciate, enjoy and be unafraid of our differences?” She thought that history may provide the means to find an answer. In the Tenement Museum, she was able to find common American ground. She figured that most Americans came from somewhere else (willingly or not); most traced their family beginnings to an urban environment; and most descended from working-class immigrants.⁴¹ She began her crusade by organizing public history tours in the Lower East Side that encompassed the Lower East Side experience.

The Peddler’s Pack Tour was a three-hour excursion, led by an interpreter assuming the role of a 78-year-old Austrian immigrant. Beginning at the Eldridge Street Synagogue, tourists

³⁸ Vecoli, “Return to the Melting Pot,” 14.

³⁹ “Manhattan Profile/Ruth J. Abram,” *Newsday*, June 30, 1988. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

⁴⁰ Lower East Side Tenement Museum, “Ruth J. Abram.”

⁴¹ Ruth J. Abram, “Using the past to shape the future: new concepts for a historic site,” *Museum International* 53:1 (2001): 4-9. <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-0033.00291> (accessed March 20, 2008).

would be treated to a short slide presentation and a tour of the building itself. Then they would proceed onto the streets, where the tour guide would show the daily lives of residents of an Eldridge Street tenement. Down Eldridge and Canal Streets, he would point out Jewish landmarks whose storefronts were now disguised as Chinese restaurants and grocery stores. The silent movie theater on East Broadway, for example, was now an appliance store. All the while during the walk, the peddler would pull from his pack memorabilia to illustrate his monologues. The tour held a universal appeal, in that average person was able to connect with the subject matter. One journalist, himself engrossed in the tour experience, was prompted to think of “the family stories my own grandmother used to tell.” Despite the passage of time and the obvious differences of the time periods, he concluded, “Some things never change.”⁴²

Columbia history professor James Shenton led “The Streets Where We Lived,” a tour for the museum through the Lower East Side and Chinatown. Not in costume, save for his ubiquitous tweed cap, Shenton showed visitors the modern-day ethnic enclave of the area – Chinatown. In 1950, the area’s Chinese population was 20,000. By 1989, it had grown exponentially to 400,000, and was expected to reach 750,000 by the century’s end. Shenton likened the Chinatown of the late 1980s to the Lower East Side of the early-twentieth century: a booming garment industry, complete with sweatshops and systematic exploitation.⁴³ The professor was a historian of a different cut, focusing not just on scholarship but also on the diffusion of that knowledge, to the public and to students of all ages. The professor displayed an authentic understanding of ethnic and class issues, having grown up in ones of the poor ethnic

⁴² “Peddler’s Paradise,” *The Walking Magazine*, February/March 1988. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

⁴³ Marc Berenson, “Tenement museum recreates ‘melting-pot,’” *Columbia Spectator*, November 27, 1989. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

communities of Northern New Jersey.⁴⁴ He also took tour groups around Ellis Island, solidifying the connection between both places.

As the name of Shenton's tour insinuated, many who made the trip down to the Lower East Side were not strangers to the neighborhood. One woman, who had once lived at 99 Orchard Street, relived her own experiences during her visit. For her, despite the hardships of the tenements, "it was magical."⁴⁵ The tours were a chance for people to relive their own early life memories or experience the neighborhood that had existed in the stories of grandparents. This phenomenon of "return" had also been the case for visitors to Ellis Island pre-restoration when the National Park Service encouraged them to share their stories with others. Such on-the-ground anecdotes would contribute a greater sense of the importance of the area.

Walking tours through the city had been popular for years; for example, the Museum of the City of New York had been offering architectural walks since 1959. In the 1960s, architectural historian Henry Hope Reed led tours through different parts of the city, such as Greenwich Village, Wall Street, and Upper Fifth Avenue.⁴⁶ Over time, the focus of the tours lay not only in architecture, but also in the experiences of the variety of people who lived in the neighborhoods. In the 1980s, the MCNY's "Irish Life in Early New York" took walkers from the Five Points neighborhood behind City Hall, to St. Patrick's Cathedral (built from 1908 to 1915 at Prince and Mott Streets), to places of importance in Revolutionary history. The four-hour tour met at St. Paul's Chapel, at Fulton Street and Broadway. Across town, "Adventure on a Shoestring" tours gave visitors to Yorkville a survey of working-class German and Hungarian family life, seeking to "capture the spirit of a community, its history and background." The group

⁴⁴ Eric Wakin, "Professor James P. Shenton '49: History's Happy Warrior," *Columbia College Today* 22, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/record/archives/vol22/vol22_iss3/Professor_Shenton.html (accessed March 22, 2008). Shenton authored *American Cooking, the Melting Pot* (1971) and *Ethnic Groups in American Life* (1978).

⁴⁵ "Days of Wine and Second-Hand Roses," *Daily News Magazine*, January 8, 1989. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

⁴⁶ These tours, as advertised in the *New York Times* targeted women, more specifically, homemakers.

would visit an enclave of townhouses built in the early 1800s, in addition to Carl Schurz Park and Gracie Mansion. The tour was just one limb of the organization's weekend excursions all over New York, from wealthy communities, to Greenwich Village, to ethnic neighborhoods.⁴⁷

The Lower East Side Historic Conservancy based its "Family Matters: An Immigrant Memoir" program on the collected memories of the Scheinberg family, who migrated from Austria Hungary at the turn of the century. An actor portraying Dr. Lois Scheinberg explained, in an Yiddish accent, to his audience what it was like to live in the tenements. With the visual aid of a slideshow of period photographs, he told of the over-crowding, poor ventilation, communal toilets and sweatshops. These were typical experiences for two-thirds of Manhattan residents. One of his happier memories was of shopping in the local street market, amid a sea of pushcarts selling anything you may need.⁴⁸ Collecting and preserving such details was the program's mission. Following the presentation, the tour guide "Scheinberg" took visitors onto the streets of his youth. The tour passed the playground at Seward Park, the public library once staffed with Yiddish books, and the now boarded-up Jewish preparatory school Rabbi Joseph Yeshiva (the "Harvard of Yeshivas," as Scheinberg described it). He pointed out the former house of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the nation's largest Yiddish-language daily newspaper; and the former Garden Cafeteria, once a Yiddish writer hangout.⁴⁹ The tour was a tribute to these places that now only existed in memory.

Such public history programs required no roof; however, after some time and the accruelement of sufficient funds, Ruth Abram and Anita Jacobson sought out office space. In 1988, they stepped into 97 Orchard Street with hopes to rent out its storefront and discovered the

⁴⁷ "Cityscapes," *Newsday*, March 31, 1989. Box 1, RG 6.2, LESTM.

⁴⁸ William A. Davis, "Still America's Gateway," *Boston Globe*, March 35, 1990. Syndicated in 120 newspapers nationwide.

⁴⁹ Audrey Clinton, "A Weekend Full of History," *Newsday*, July 22, 1988. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

tenement building had much more to offer. The interior of the tenement had been boarded up for decades.⁵⁰ It was a relic, and it would, with some more time, become a shrine.

The Tenement Becomes a Museum

New Yorkers have two topics of conversation that never fail to spark interest. One is where to eat. The other is comparing crummy apartments and bloodsucking landlords. Everyone has horror stories to tell about how they finally, after travail that would make Odysseus throw in the towel, managed to find a hole-in-the-wall rattrap where angels fear to tread. It's one of the things that makes living in this worthwhile, right? Bragging about how tough you are? Well, let me tell you something, kids. When it comes to hellish living conditions, you ain't seen nothin' yet.⁵¹

At the turn of the century, no one was bragging about those “hellish living conditions” this journalist was writing about in the *East Villager*. Those very conditions, however, are what make the Tenement Museum unique. The building at 97 Orchard Street looks quite similar to the rows of tenement houses in the neighborhood. The five stories of red brick measure less than 25 feet across, and are topped off with a metal cornice designed to resemble stone. Originally, an iron fire escape hung down the front, in place with an 1862 law. In the back, a “party wall balcony” linked 97 and 99 Orchard Streets, allowing for tenants to escape from one building to another in case of fire.⁵² There have been little changes made to the tenement, which had been built in 1863 before housing laws governed construction. This fact made it an “Old Law” tenement, one of the few left.

As cluttered and packed the rows of tenements appeared on the outside, it did not compare to the crowded conditions inside. In this typical tenement, four Pullman apartments lined each floor. Each apartment floor plan had a 10 by 12 foot living room, then a kitchen, and

⁵⁰ Abram, “A Museum Grew In Me.”

⁵¹ “The Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *East Villager*, December 1988. RG 6.2, Box 1, LESTM.

⁵² Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Santa Fe: Center for American Places, 2006), 27-30.

two bedrooms. The tenement's twenty apartments were first rented out in 1864. The 1870 census records showed its residents to be predominantly from German-speaking lands. Family sizes ranged from one to eight people. Only a few decades later, there were 10-12 people crowding single tenements, living in the most populated area in the world, the 10th Ward. Reformers pushed for housing laws to lessen the death and disease.⁵³ It is estimated that 7,000 people lived in its apartments, until its owners sealed it up in 1935.

A special preview of the Tenement Museum, held months before its official opening in 1988, brought to the neighborhood Mayor Koch and 200 invited guests, including the consul generals of the native countries of the former tenants.⁵⁴ Koch, whose grandmother had lived in the neighborhood, arrived in a horse-drawn, straw-strewn wagon, accompanied by other characters in period dress. Inside the building on the second floor, the actor-immigrants toiled at their craft by gaslight, pretending to live in an era before electricity. A black woman shelled peas in her 1850s apartment, and an Italian family stricken by diphtheria remained quarantined in the rear rooms. A German seamstress outfitted the mayor for a \$10 suit. "I prefer living in these days but I certainly enjoy the memories of those days," Koch told the *New York Post*. "If these memories are perpetuated in your museum, then this town will be the richer for it."⁵⁵

To create its "living history," the museum had to supply the actors. The apartments themselves, however, supplied an authentic air. Remnants of the past were everywhere. A tailor's orders were penciled on a room partition. A sign announced "Pants Made To Order,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ In the beginning, the Museum operated on the first floor, with a display area and performance space open on a regular basis. On special fundraising occasions, the museum peopled four apartments on the second floor with an Italian family, a free black woman, a Chinese laundry worker and a German seamstress – actors and actresses talked about their daily lives. William A. Davis, "Still America's Gateway," *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1990. PQ.

⁵⁵ Karen Phillips, "Time machine tenement shows the way we were," *New York Post*, June 9, 1988; and Anne Canty, "Shamrocks in the Apple." Box 1, RG 6.2: LESTM Publicity, Press Clippings 1984-1991, LESTM.

\$1.50.”⁵⁶ The Museum intended its actors to interact with the visitors, as the former group went about its daily routines. The smells of cooking, hair oil, and latrines would be replicated.⁵⁷ A tape recording produced a montage of street sounds, including horse hooves, the cries of street vendors and singing.⁵⁸

The *Irish Echo* described the museum preview of the tenement experience, staffed with actors, as giving one “the uneasy feeling of being on a movie or TV set: Hollywood meets history.” The museum’s good intentions aside, the critic could not completely swallow the “filtered electric lights streaming down a make believe air shaft, steam machines and studiously peeling paint.” The first two observations may have been products of the museum, but the peeling paint was probably authentic. Visitors were introduced to Mary Margaret Reilly, a peddler, who told them she was married to James Patrick. The reviewer noted, “despite what are probably authentic details, dealing with actors and actresses lacked dimension. It almost trivialized the experience.”⁵⁹ Such criticism did not give recognition to the museum’s location itself. For visitors would not just be coming to the tenement to learn about the people who lived there, but also to experience, firsthand, the conditions in which they lived. How to combine those two factors to advance the mission was to be determined in the upcoming years.

The stories told by the immigrants were part of the museum’s larger mission: “To promote tolerance through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant experiences on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, a gateway to America.”⁶⁰ Despite the neighborhood’s place in Jewish-American memory, the Tenement Museum set out to portray the

⁵⁶ Bob Weinstein, “They ALL Lived Here,” *Newsday*, June 16, 1988. Box 1, RG 6.2: LESTM Publicity, Press Clippings 1984-1991, LESTM.

⁵⁷ “Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *East Villager*.

⁵⁸ Lisa Keys, “Immigration Museum called Bad Neighbor In Expansion Battle,” *Forward*, February 6, 2002.

⁵⁹ Anne Canty, “Shamrocks in the Apple,” *Irish Echo*, June 25, 1988. LESTM.

⁶⁰ Abram, “A Museum Grew In Me.”

ethnic diversity of the neighborhood. Museum research had revealed that free blacks lived in the area in the 1850s, the Irish in the 1860s, the Germans in 1870s, the Chinese in 1890s, the Russian-Polish Jews in the 1900s, and the Italians in 1910. Abram explained, “We *are* a nation of immigrants, and from that flows prejudice, assimilation, class systems. The big question is how will we be one nation and, at the same time, how will we appreciate and be aware of the sometimes profound differences between us.”⁶¹

The museum relied on the pull of the area’s Jewish memory in getting itself off the ground. It advertised heavily in Jewish newspapers nationwide. Jewish tour groups, such as those organized by synagogues and Jewish community centers, were the main participants in pre-arranged visits. Historian Hasia Diner likened these Jewish tours of the Tenement to their pilgrimages to the Eldridge Street Synagogue. Diner, who was a consulting historian in the early days of the Tenement, is convinced that the Tenement has a specifically Jewish appeal, despite the absence of any particularly Jewish design within the Museum.⁶² If the name itself, the Lower East Side, was inherently Jewish, then Abram need not mention the Jewish experience in describing her ambitions for the museum to *New York Newsday* in 1988: “It will be a living museum, in which actors portraying Irish, German, Italians, among others, will be dressed in period clothes.”⁶³ Although Kammen has indicated that the 1980s saw a decrease in the usage of words with religious connotations, calling the Tenement Museum “a sacred site” seemed unavoidable.

The tenement’s presentation of living history prompted comparisons to Virginia’s Colonial Williamsburg. The interpretation of a colonial American town, Williamsburg impressed

⁶¹ Hal Kloppe, “Tenement Museum Has Atmosphere, History” *Lower East Side Voice*, Winter 1988. LESTM.

⁶² Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, 118.

⁶³ “Manhattan Profile/Ruth J. Abram,” *New York Newsday*, June 30, 1988. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM Publicity-Press Clippings.

upon visitors in the 1950s “very powerful feelings of national pride and patriotism.”⁶⁴ Visitors had long considered their trip a “pilgrimage.”⁶⁵ Newcomers to the nation and the children of immigrants voiced their appreciation for being able to experience one of the birthplaces of freedom. The initial picture of colonial life was biased against class and race, omitting the living conditions of the poor, slaves, and indentured servants lived. One early Williamsburg administrator observed, “The absence of any evidence of lower-class life gives some visitors a feeling that Williamsburg is ashamed of this aspect of colonial life”⁶⁶ In not masking the travails of the tenants, the museum sought to dispel the shame once attached to immigrant life in the tenements. At the same time it did not shy away from putting some blame on the nation, which, Abram said, allowed the nearly inhabitable conditions to endure. “If you offer Americans the opportunity to examine history with a hundred years’ distance, many more will take to it.”⁶⁷

From the onset, the Tenement was vehement in its message that the living history it would be presenting would not be the Colonial Williamsburg of the city.⁶⁸ It would have been cheaper to tear down the building and re-create it, rather than make the structural improvements to bring it to present-day code.⁶⁹ The marketing and public relations director Larry Fried explained to the *East Villager*, the tenement would “give people a chance to meet their great-grandmother. They’ll be able to help their grandmother cook, or argue points in the Torah with

⁶⁴ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 547.

⁶⁵ Attendance rates to the old city rose from nearly 94,000 in 1945 to more than 166,000 in 1946, to 341,000 in 1956, to 722,000 in 1966. The year of the American Bicentennial, a record of 1,289,302 visited. Kammen, 552.

⁶⁶ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 547.

⁶⁷ Hal Kloppe, “Tenement Museum Has Atmosphere, History,” *Lower East Side Voice*, Winter 1988. RG 6.2 Box 1. LESTM.

⁶⁸ Colonial Williamsburg is a combination of restored and recreated buildings. In 1985 the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had completed a reconstruction of the 1771-73 Public Hospital, the first building in the country designed solely as an insane asylum. The original building was destroyed in a fire in the late 1800s, and aimed to create realistically the settings that people once occupied. The exhibition, taking up less than a fourth of the actual building, dealt with the basic changes in community perceptions about the mentally ill and related modifications in their treatment. Edward A. Chappell, “Social Responsibility and the American History Museum.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 24:4 (Winter 1989): 256. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1181238> (accessed March 15, 2008).

⁶⁹ Jeanne Blumberg, “Tenacity and the tenement,” *Gannett Westchester Newspaper*, December 10, 1989. RG 6.2 Box 1. LESTM.

their great-uncles. It'll be like Colonial Williamsburg, but not so precious."⁷⁰ Nor would the museum be "a sanitized version of tenement life that belongs in Disneyland."⁷¹ Visitors to the Lower East Side recognized and appreciated the tenement experience. One visitor wrote, "I was overwhelmed by yesterday's experience [of visiting the Museum]. It certainly gave me more insight into how my immigrant ancestors lived when they arrived in New York in the 1800s. It was more rewarding than Colonial Williamsburg."⁷² One visitor, Miriam Weiner, who was also a certified genealogist, author, and lecturer, recounted her own visit in a newspaper column that was syndicated in Jewish-American newsletters through the country, and how it helped her know the grandmother she never knew.⁷³ The Tenement became more than a site for people to figuratively reconnect with pasts they did not know. Members of the Solomowitz family, whose ancestors lived in 97 Orchard in 1905, were rejoined through the work of the Tenement Museum, and held a family reunion there.⁷⁴ Searching for tangible connections with one's past was the defining characteristic of the genealogy craze of the 1970s.

Various country houses and museums have offered Americans the opportunity to explore a specific period frozen in time. The passage of the National Museum Act and National Preservation Act in 1966 signaled the nation's attention to preserving history by providing financial and moral support for museums and preservation programs.⁷⁵ In years following, Manhattan welcomed such monuments to the 18th and 19th centuries as the Dyckman House (1967), the Morris Jumel Mansion (1969), and Gracie Mansion (1975), to the National

⁷⁰ "The Lower East Side Tenement Museum," *East Villager*, December 1988. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM.

⁷¹ Randy Diamond, "Tenement History Rebuilt In Museum," *The Examiner*, n.d. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM.

⁷² Letters, *Tenement Times*, 3:1 (Spring 1992). Box 1, RG 6.2, LESTM.

⁷³ Miriam Weiner, "The Family Trees That Grew On Orchard Street," *Charleston Jewish Journal*, December 1989. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM Publicity-Press Clippings.

⁷⁴ Ruth Abram to Trustees, September Report, 1990, RG 1.1, Administrative Records, Board of Trustees Meetings: Minutes and Memoranda, Mar. 1988 – Jun. 1991, Box 1. LESTM.

⁷⁵ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 613.

Register.⁷⁶ These designations continued the tradition of honoring the founding history of both the city and the nation. Taking a step toward recognizing immigrant history, the Henry Street Settlement House was designated a Historic National Landmark in May 1974. Its statement of significance, however, focused on the accomplishments of its founder, Lillian Wald, a suffragist and pacifist, rather than the immigrants who had passed through.⁷⁷

A shortage in funds would prove to be a deterrent throughout the museum's starting years.⁷⁸ The Lower East Side Historic Conservancy operated on grants and donations, and estimated it would need \$3 million to work on its tenement. As of 1988, Philip Morris Inc. had donated \$75,000 for 18 historians around the country to develop profiles of the families to be presented in the tenement; the Ford Foundation gave \$50,000 to develop a Black Heritage Trail, tracing the development and contributions of the area's black community; and the National Endowment for the Humanities donated \$70,000 to research five other heritage trails.⁷⁹

Throughout its development, museum officials kept their audience up-to-date with its biannual *Tenement Times*. First published in the fall of 1989, the newsletter was begun to keep students, teachers and the general public informed of the latest research uncovered about the Tenement. The first issue focused on the history of 97 Orchard Street. *Tenement Times*, however, was not just a source of information for those supporters of the museum. It also sought to continue the conversations its research began. The column "Bright Ideas" suggested activities and questions for educators and readers, based on themes found in the newsletter. One activity asked participants to interview developers in their neighborhoods, asking questions about laws

⁷⁶ Lists of National Historic Landmarks, National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/designations/listsofNHLs.htm> (accessed March 10, 2008).

⁷⁷ "Henry Street Settlement and Playground," National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, <http://tps.cr.nps.gov/nhl/detail.cfm?ResourceId=1465&ResourceType=Building> (accessed November 15, 2007).

⁷⁸ "Manhattan Profile/Ruth J. Abram," *New York Newsday*, June 30, 1988. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM Publicity-Press Clippings, LESTM.

⁷⁹ Bob Weinstein, "In One Tenement, A City's History," *Newsday*, June 16, 1988. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM Publicity-Press Clippings, LESTM.

and building codes, and then to compare structures past and present. Another segment encouraged readers to identify the immigrant roots and the Americanization of any family recipes that had been handed down. The letters section featured a note from Mayor Koch. Koch declared himself a lifetime member of the organization and hailed “the values of family life, hard work and public education” found within the museum’s message.⁸⁰

The museum’s newsletter helped further its mission beyond exhibits and the place of the tenement itself. One reader, Gina Manuel, wrote in, “overjoyed” that “at last the history of my family will be preserved.” She shared the story of her African-American, Catholic ancestors who lived in the tenements, voted for Tammany (the city’s Democratic political machine), and were there for the city’s Civil War riots. “Most seem to write us off when they look at the history of New York City and America. But my people were part of New York City before it was a city as such.”⁸¹ Letters such as Manuel’s provided reaffirmation of the importance of personal histories and how they related to the history of the city.

Intent on learning as much as possible about the life of 97 Orchard Street, the museum launched a nationwide search to find its former residents or their families. Newspapers spread the campaign, offering the list of the tenement’s 700 residents to anyone who may have a connection with one of the residents.⁸² The search began on Independence Day 1989, and by the end of 1989, four former tenants had returned. By July of the following year, out of 1,000 inquiries, 11 families (10 former residents and one retail tenant) had been identified.⁸³ One resident who came forward was Josephine Drago, whose family was one of six Italian families living in the tenement during the Depression. Her family lived on the third floor from 1930-35.

⁸⁰ Ed Koch, Letters, *Tenement Times* 1:1 (Fall 1989): 2. Box 3, RG 5.2, LESTM.

⁸¹ Gina Manuel, Letters, *Tenement Times* 1:1 (Fall 1989): 2. Box 3, RG 5.2, LESTM.

⁸² “Tenement Museum Seeks Names of Immigrants Who Started There,” *New York City Tribune*, September 5, 1989. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM.

⁸³ Larry Fried, End of Year Marketing/PR Review, July 7, 1990. LESTM.

Drago shared in the *Tenement Times* her childhood stories in the *Tenement Times*, of going to the shower houses on Allen Street, having picnics on the roof and sleeping in parks during the summer to escape the heat of the tenement.⁸⁴ Personal memories like these were now diffused into the public sphere and became part of a greater history.

The memories and records the museum collected provided depth to the stories of Lower East Side life. The variety of stories revealed the complexity behind any attempt to create one universal immigrant storyline. Abram wrote in her *Tenement Times* “High Stoop” column: “The same oral history which attests to an immigrant’s capacity for empathy reveals prejudicial tendencies.” She recounted the story of one former resident, who had fondly recalled a community that helped others despite different backgrounds, while also remembering a fear of the Chinese laundryman. To tell the entire story, in all its complexity, would be to honor the true character of the immigrants who came then. And immigrants of the present day would feel welcome, for they might relate and see reflections of themselves.⁸⁵

In 1991, the museum determined that it would design its exhibits solely on research it conducted. The conclusion came from a self-study, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which involved research and discussions with museum professionals, poets, immigrant advocates, scholars and others. It was at that point in the museum’s development that officials decided to base their interpretations on the stories of the actual residents of the tenement. To find out more about these “urban pioneers,” the museum looked into historical resources such as census records, Civil War draft records, voter lists, school records, birth and death certificates, court records, factory inspector lists, and city directories.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ “Museum Census,” *Tenement Times* 1:1 (Fall 1989): 7. Box 3, RG 5.2. LESTM.

⁸⁵ Abram, “From the High Stoop: An Asset to This Country,” *Tenement Times*, 4:1, 2 (1993) Box 3, RG 5.2.

⁸⁶ Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House*, 115.

The Tenement Museum grabbed the national spotlight soon after. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in September 1992.⁸⁷ “This symbolic recognition of the grit and determination of our nation’s urban, working class immigrants is long overdue,” wrote Abram following the listing.⁸⁸ Governor Cuomo led a ceremony at the building, to celebrate its placement on the register.⁸⁹ In 1994, the tenement at 97 Orchard became a National Historic Landmark.⁹⁰ From 1988 to 1994, the museum’s initial volunteer staff of two and its \$75,000 budget grew to be a 100-person collection of staff, consultants, and volunteers working with a \$5 million budget.⁹¹ In 1998, the informal affiliations of the Tenement Museum with Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty became official, as President Bill Clinton signed legislation authorizing a National Park Service affiliation. The National Trust for Historic Preservation also took up the tenement within its ranks, adding it to the nation’s fabled properties, including Montpelier, Woodrow Wilson House, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Home and Studio.⁹²

The Tenement’s ground-breaking design excited the museum world. By crossing boundaries of “ethnicity and class, public and private, past and present,” the Tenement held promise “to be not just another museum, but to be part of a watershed moment in the history of

⁸⁷ To commemorate this designation, the museum hung a sign in front of 97 Orchard Street, announcing: “Built in 1862-1864 by Lucas Glockner, a German-born tailor, 97 Orchard Street is typical of the earliest form of tenement house constructed in New York. For millions of immigrants from scores of nations, this tenement and others like it was a place of first settlement in America. We salute them as our urban pioneers on the municipal frontier. This is the first tenement to be individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.

⁸⁸ Abram, “From the High Stoop: An Asset to This Country,” *Tenement Times*, 1993. Box 3, RG 5.2.

⁸⁹ “Postings: The Tenement Museum; Now, Landmark Status,” *NYT*, September 20, 1992.

⁹⁰ The Statement of Significance for the tenement’s designation on April 19, 1994, read: “This six-story brick tenement is an outstanding survivor of the vast number of humble buildings that housed immigrants to New York during the greatest wave of immigration in American history. Erected in 1863-64, it represents the first rush of tenement building in New York City. The top two floors of this 97 Orchard Street contain rooms, wallpaper, plumbing, and lighting preserved as they were left almost 60 years ago, when they were boarded up and sealed until their discovery in 1988. Something of an urban time machine, the building is able to convey a vivid sense of the deplorable living conditions experienced by its tenants, which, during its 72-year tenure as housing, may have numbered as many as 10,000.”

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² LESTM, “Ruth J. Abram.”

museums,” wrote Gary Kulik in his 1992 report to the American Association of Museums. It demonstrated the “multiple roles that history museums can play in promoting neighborhood revitalization and social tolerance,” wrote one reviewer.⁹³

A sense of history, in more respects than one, pervaded the dedication of the Gumpertz and the Baldizzi apartments in September 1994. Abram called it “a pivotal moment in the history of museums.”⁹⁴ The 1994 debut tour, called “Hard Time Stories and Morning Glories” (later renamed “Getting By; Weathering the Great Depressions of 1873 and 1929”) provided “comfort, inspiration and perspective to people coping with today’s problems.”⁹⁵ The Baldizzis apartment, representing 1935 tenement life, had come together with the help of former resident Josephine Baldizzi Esposito. Esposito had lived in an apartment at 97 Orchard Street from 1928 to 1935 with her family. When she discovered that the building had become a museum, she lent her memories and family artifacts to curators so they could authentically recreate her apartment as it had been in 1934. A full-size bed was in the front room, the only room with windows, which were covered by lace curtains. Adorning the bed was a cover that had made the trip from Palermo with her mother, Rosaira, in 1924. Josephine and her brother slept in the back room, where a folding bed and trunk could be found. The middle room – a kitchen, dining area, and living area all in one – was set up as it would have been a few days before Christmas. The Gumpertz apartment told the story of Nathalia Gumpertz, whose husband never returned from work on October 7, 1874. Nathalia was left with four children to raise, and supported the German-Jewish family by dressmaking in the tenement.

⁹³ Charles Hardy III, “Exhibition Review, Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *The Journal of American History* (December 1997): 1009-1013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2953095> (accessed April 8, 2008).

⁹⁴ Abram, “From the High Stoop,” *Tenement Times* 5:2 (Fall 1994). RG 5.2, Box 3, LESTM.

⁹⁵ Sharon Seitz (ed.), *A Tenement Story: The History of 97 Orchard Street and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum* (New York: Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 2004), 17.

The museum purchased the building in 1996 for \$750,000 and ended its capital campaign a year later.⁹⁶ Twenty-five years previous, a few blocks up, in the East Village section (east of Avenue A), the five-story Old Law and New Law tenements had been priced at \$17,000 to \$21,000.⁹⁷ As part of its \$3 million campaign, the museum had offered patrons the chance to sponsor projects or actual parts of the tenement, whether out of “interest in setting the historical record straight or to memorialize a friend or family member.” For example, the Immigrant Education Center, with a \$50,000 price tag, was “past, present, and future intertwined. A bargain.” The Gumpertz and Baldizzi apartments asked \$250,000 for sponsorship, while the mailboxes that had once been filled with 2-cent stamped letters were going for \$5,000.⁹⁸

The Confino apartment debuted three years later, relaying the story of the Sephardic-Jewish family from Kastoria through the eyes of the teenage Victoria Confino. A costumed interpreter playing the part welcomed visitors into the past as if they were newly arrived immigrants in 1916. Victoria educated them on how to adapt to life in America, and visitors were allowed to touch any apartment item. Soon after, in spring 1998, the museum had interpreted the story of the Rogarshevsky family, who emigrated from Lithuania in 1901.⁹⁹ The Tenement sought to provide a connection between visitors and their family who may have once lived in such striking conditions.

Because visitors could only access the Tenement through a guided tour, the museum considered a meaningful and thought-provoking interpretive approach of particular importance. The tenement engaged with the constructivist method of interpretation, which was “an education

⁹⁶ “Funding of \$100,000 and over came from sources such as New York State, the National Endowment for the Humanities, The New York Times, the Kresge Foundation, Leo & Julia Forchheimer Foundation, Booth Ferris Foundation, the Tisch Family Foundation and individuals like George and Susan Soros, Elihu and Susan Rose, Leon Levy and Shelby White and Edith and Henry Everett,” LESTM, Frequently Asked Questions.

⁹⁷ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 224.

⁹⁸ “Museum Plans and Prices,” *The Tenement Times*, 1994. RG 5.2, Box 1, LESTM.

⁹⁹ The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, www.tenement.org (accessed March 22, 2008).

approach that emphasizes the learner's unique ability to make their own meaning out of information." Tour guides would present the information to their visitors, and ask them questions, so that they would make connections of their own. Civic engagement was the desired result that the visitor "would become an active participant in shaping the issue." To promote discussion, tour guides were urged to ask open-ended questions, without a definitive answer, which allowed for a variety of responds and creative answers.¹⁰⁰

Abram created the tenement in "a response to those who argue that strong ethnic and religious identities interfere with assimilation and must be abandoned, as well as those who believe Old World ties are essential to survival."¹⁰¹ With that in mind, the tour guides' dialogue would be designed to convey the immigrants' struggle to adapt to the new world while maintaining their own national cultures.¹⁰²

The Tenement has stayed true to its founding mission, representing not just the past but maintaining an active role in the community. A review of the Tenement Museum in 1997 hailed its innovative community outreach. The museum worked with the local University Settlement, the social service organization on Eldridge Street, to recruit multilingual tour guides. Adult students of English language classes conducted Tenement tours in their native language and in English as a graduation requirement.¹⁰³ It was the first Immigrant Programs Department for a National Historic Site.¹⁰⁴ The Tenement Museum sought to fill other voids in the museum world. Urban Museum Studies Program, joined by the City University of New York and the American Association of Museums, to bolster the amount of people from working class, minority, or

¹⁰⁰ LESTM, "Interpretive Methodology."

¹⁰¹ Seitz, *A Tenement Story*, 11.

¹⁰² James S. Kopchains, "Remembrance of Things Pasta: Old Tenement Will Be a Museum," *New York City Tribune*, June 8 1989. RG 6.2 Box 1, LESTM,

¹⁰³ Hardy, "Exhibition Review, Lower East Side Tenement Museum."

¹⁰⁴ Seitz, *A Tenement Story*, 21.

immigrant backgrounds in the museum profession.¹⁰⁵ The Tenement Museum also contributed exhibits to the Lower East Side Festival in 1996. For many years known as the Lower East Side Jewish Festival, the event expanded its appeal to all groups, calling itself “Gateway to the American Dream.”¹⁰⁶

The idea of museums educating new immigrants was not new. The Museum of the City of New York wanted to be “sociological” in its education of young people, orientating its programs toward educating immigrants about their city and nation.¹⁰⁷ “While all history museums – from Williamsburg down to the smallest house museum – expected their work to be relevant to the present, the MCNY distinguished itself by the extent to which it emphasized the role the museum would play in the unfolding of New York’s future.”¹⁰⁸

A Place for More than Memory

Visitors to the Lower East Side can take history into their own hands, quite literally, with Ruth Limmer’s *Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side: A Walking Guide* (1997).¹⁰⁹ Based on the early tours given by the Tenement Museum, Limmer’s book takes visitors through individual African, German, Irish, Chinese, Jewish, and Italian heritage tours. Each tour description provides a concise history of the community, paired with an epilogue that explains what happened to the group after moving out of the Lower East Side. The Irish, for instance, rose in politics and city positions. The Italians, “now a part of mainstream America,” moved to Staten Island, the Bronx, Long Island, and elsewhere. The African-Americans, however, were “unlike

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Abram, “From the High Stoop,” *The Tenement Times*, 1994. RG 5.2, Box 3, LESTM.

¹⁰⁶ “Something for Everyone at an Expanded Festival,” *NYT*, June 16, 1996.

¹⁰⁷ Page, *Creative Destruction of Manhattan*, 161-164.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Limmer, *Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said of the book: “Any guide book to the Lower East Side of Manhattan that acknowledges Lorenzo Da Ponte, Ira Aldridge, Henry James, and Emma Goldman – absent the usual ‘huddled masses’ or the ‘wretched refuse’ of anyone’s ‘teeming shores’ – is by definition a joy and an education.”

the other groups whose first American settlements were on the Lower East Side.” Rather than moving up and out, Limmer writes, “the majority of African Americans are still confined to segregated neighborhoods.”¹¹⁰ Limmer also left the fate of the Chinese unresolved. Although many in the Lower East Side were now prosperous business owners and professionals, some Chinese Americans “have not forgotten what it took for them to be considered “American,” and some feel they still have to get there.”¹¹¹ This walking guide included its share of immigrant success stories, but also illustrates the obstacles yet to be overcome. The honest portrayals exemplify the difference between the Tenement Museum and the subjects of past chapters.

The Tenement Museum introduced a new way of presenting American history. Before the tenement, American museums grounded their exhibits in “aesthetic sensibilities: optimistic, attractive, reassuring things and ideas,” Edward Chappell wrote in 1989. Chappell questioned the reluctance of museums to present “settings that illustrate a range of society and that raise questions about relationships within the systems.” He called for a presentation of history “that is simply more democratic, more representative of realities, to depict the systems that everyone dealt with, and that – however distant in time – are still likely to affect us.”¹¹² In creating her museum, Abram sought that very connection between the past and present. This thesis’ examination of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum acknowledges that the institution’s founding was not accidental. Abram’s idea was born of decades of social misunderstandings. She formed a museum that used the past as a vehicle for understanding the present.

Historian John Bodnar defines public memory as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹¹² Edward A. Chappell, “Social Responsibility and the American History Museum,” 264. Chappell included in his discussion examples of European museums, including the Tenement House, a Glasgow flat. The apartment, in a row of 1890s-era attached tenements, had been occupied by a shipping clerk until about 1965.

He places this memory at the intersection of “official” and “vernacular” culture. In the “official” realm, leaders jointly use memory to unify, to continue institutions, and uphold the present state of affairs. To adhere to these goals, the past is presented abstractly, in terms of “timelessness and sacredness,” as was seen with the Liberty Weekend narratives concerning the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Bodnar points out this official culture will usually promote a nationalistic and patriotic culture of the whole. Vernacular culture works at “protecting values and restating views of reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities.” There is less agreement on a singular cultural interpretation. This culture conveys “what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.”¹¹³

The creation of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, then, has created a dynamic space for the official and vernacular cultures to meet. The museum’s self-published biography, *A Tenement Story*, closes with a precise idea of what makes their Historic Landmark different: “Far from a collection of static ‘period rooms,’ 97 Orchard Street has become the center of animated conversation about making it in – and remaking – America.”¹¹⁴ The nation’s latest shrine to immigration history continues to push the social, political and urban issues that were first raised in the 1960s and continue to be present today.

¹¹³ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13-14.

¹¹⁴ Seitz, *A Tenement Story*, 21.

– EPILOGUE –
Into the 21st Century

If not for the sign hanging in front of 97 Orchard Street, declaring the building a national landmark, its wooden panel façade may not attract the attention of passerby. The streetscape is bustling in 2008, though you won't see the plethora of pushcarts as in the early part of the last century. Grand Street smells of fish. Chinatown is burgeoning with people and their wares, often visible on the outside of their storefronts, luring passerby to take a look. The neighborhood is still an eclectic mix of people and buildings. Similar to the persistence of ethnic identification through the 1980s, attention to this tenement and the other gateway shrines has not faded in the new century. Years after state and national designation officially recognized these historic landmarks, their meanings as sites of public memory continue to transform with time.

Gentrification is taking its toll in the Lower East Side. Community groups rally to fight such intrusions as a \$250 million buy-out of the local supermarket by a luxury condo developer.¹ The delicatessens and the bakeries that kept people coming back for a taste of the "old world" have been closing. Recently Hester Street's famous bakery Gertel's closed its doors, leaving Gus's Pickles, Katz's Delicatessen, and a few others to continue the tradition.² Any observer would be quick to realize the Lower East Side has taken on a new set of residents, including Web designers, fashion photographers, makeup artists, a smattering of lawyers and stockbrokers. One journalist notes that these newcomers, as did their immigrant forbearers, bring to the

¹ Matthew R. Warren, "A YIMBY Crowd Rallies on the Lower East Side," *NYT* Weblog, posted December 20, 2007, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/12/20/a-yimby-crowd-rallies-on-the-lower-east-side/> (accessed April 8, 2008).

² Joseph Berger, "No More Babka? There Goes the Neighborhood," *NYT* Weblog, posted July 2, 2007, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/07/02/no-more-babka-there-goes-the-neighborhood/> (accessed January 8, 2008).

neighborhood their own tastes: hip and trendy bars, cafes, shops, and restaurants.³ But the Lower East Side's new residents share the neighborhood with immigrants yet. And the Tenement Museum is an active force in helping those new immigrants, while also telling the story of the old immigrants.

In 2001, The Tenement Museum's board of directors created a 10-year vision statement. Against a changing environment, they planned for the museum to remain "a center for encounter and dialogue among immigrants and their descendants, as well as among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners working on historical and contemporary immigration-related issues," and expect to expand to two million annual visitors by 2011. Their other goals for the museum included providing multi-lingual programming and materials, developing new programs such as a New York Immigration Curriculum and hosting tenement sleepovers, and instigating ongoing dialogues.⁴

The Tenement Museum has expanded beyond 97 Orchard Street to include two other buildings, positioned to the left and the right of the tenement.⁵ The white building on the corner of Broome and Orchard holds the museum's main offices, library, and archival holdings. On the

³ Jesse McKinley, "Where the Lower East Side Keeps Trendy Masses at Bay," *NYT*, February 6, 2004. In 2004, a new kind of tenement moved into 100 Orchard Street, across the street from the Tenement Museum – a chic, trendy tenement *hotel*. The antithesis of the Tenement Museum, the Blue Moon Hotel is a renovated tenement building, Disney World-style. Randy Settenbrino, grandson of Italian-American and Russian-Jewish immigrants, inherited the building in 2000. Settenbrino grew up not far off in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, fascinated with his immigrant ancestry and the Lower East Side. The 22-room guest house combines period details with such modern comforts as whirlpool baths and a jazz lounge in the basement. A restaurant serves kosher food, derived from the recipes of Settenbrino's grandmothers. And people can experience it for \$250 a night. Max Gross, "Hotelier Planning Downtown Inn With Tenement Chic," *Forward*, July 23, 2004, 2; and John Freeman Gill, "Tenement Life, at \$200-Plus a Night," *NYT*, October 3, 2004.

⁴ "Lower East Side Tenement Museum's Vision Statement May 2001, Envisioning the Museum in 2011," courtesy of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

⁵ The museum has also been expanding. In 2004, the museum took interest in its neighbor tenement, 99 Orchard Street, and sought to acquire it. Install an elevator for the handicapped, double its annual capacity to 200,000 visitors and recreate more apartments. The issue received press coverage because the neighbors, the Holtzmans, were not willing to sell, and the Tenement tried to take it through the powers of eminent domain. Denny Lee, "Neighborhood Report: Lower East Side; A Tenement Owner Gets a Reprieve As a Museum Peers Over His Shoulder," *NYT*, August 11, 2002.

other end, near Delancey, is the Visitor's Center. Walk into the Visitor's Center and you'll see available tour times are written on a blackboard behind the counter. In contrast with the tenement itself, the center is bit more trendy and updated with piles of books and New York City trinkets. The Museum encourages its visitors to purchase their tour tickets in advance. As the tours of 15 fill up, the times get crossed off the list. The later in the afternoon you arrive, the less likely you'll find a tour open.

The "Getting By Tour" departs at 4:30. Stepping inside in tenement, the group leaves behind the sounds of the city and the signs that advertise the "Discount Garment District." Inside, our "educator" tour guide preps the group of fifteen for their walk through. He relays a brief, but extensive history of the neighborhood, from its first prosperous Dutch settlers, when orchards lined Orchard Street, to the building of these tenements to house working people. "They were very acceptable buildings for what they were at the time," he tells the group.⁶

The tour takes the visitors – mostly middle-aged couples, including a mother and daughter and a German tourist – first to the bottom of the stairs, where thousands of new Americans had walked before. The dark hallway is lit by a single bulb in the ceiling. The group proceeds up first to the Gumpertz apartment, where the educator explains the story of Nathalie Gumpertz, a German seamstress who worked out of the apartment to support her family after her husband disappeared. Laminated photocopies of pictures and other related documents are passed around the group to illustrate the anecdotes. It is a personal and inspirational story. Next is the apartment of the Baldizzis, a Sicilian Catholic family who had arrived in New York via Canada. They were illegal immigrants, the educator points out, prompting a comparison to the debates of illegal immigrants today.

⁶ "Getting By Tour," Lower East Side Tenement Museum, personal visit, January 3, 2008.

It ends in an empty apartment, the way it was originally found in 1988. The bright lights of Allen Street – Chinatown – shine through the windows. The guide likens the living conditions contemporary immigrants face with those in the time that the this tenement was in use. Immigrants are still living in tenements today. One tourist visitor is shocked by the expense of these homes. The conversation takes on broader themes of present immigration, to the debates surrounding the U.S.-Mexican border. Immigration disputes are not limited to the United States, our educator references England and the nativism rising from an influx of Polish workers to the country.⁷

As the tenement's neighborhood has changed with the times, most of Ellis Island has continued to age unpreserved. The American Immigrant Wall of Honor, Iacocca's brainchild, stands as a permanent exhibit of over 600,000 individual and family names. It is advertised as "the only place in the country where an individual can honor his or her family's heritage at a national monument"⁸ But the fate of the smattering of buildings was never decided in the 1980s, as the Great Hall underwent restoration. In 1992, the National Park Service dropped its plan to demolish 12 of the structures, including the immigrant waiting room, recreation building, and measles wards. Opponents had argued that the demolition "would amount to the destruction of a national shrine." Fifty plans had been proposed and abandoned since 1958.⁹ In 1997, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed Ellis Island on its annual list of the nation's

⁷ And for those unable to make the trip, or "pilgrimage," to the Lower East Side, they can turn to the museum's Web site. There, visitors can see 360-degree photographs of each room of the five interpreted apartments, as well as hear an audio file version of the tour. The site presents the history of each family. It poses questions based on the historic situations to present day immigrants, as well, and records their versions to demonstrate a breadth of cultural differences, but shared experiences. Lower East Side Tenement Museum Web site, <http://www.tenement.org/>.

⁸ "FAQs About The American Immigrant Wall of Honor," *Liberty Highlights: The Official Newsletter of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation* 2:1 (Summer 2003). Folder: Statue of Liberty 1987-2005, NJ Room, JCPL.

⁹ Al Frank, "Park Service scraps demolition at Ellis," *Star-Ledger*, July 2, 1992. Folder: Ellis Island 1992, Zapp Papers, NJ Room, JCPL.

eleven “most endangered historic places.”¹⁰ In 2000, New Jersey Governor Christie Whitman approved a \$300 million plan to rebuild the complex.¹¹

In 2007, the Save Ellis Island! foundation launched a set of television commercials to raise awareness for the part of the island left unpreserved. The publicly-supported nonprofit foundation was formed at the beginning of the decade, dedicated to rescuing all 29 decaying buildings. It is the primary fundraising partner of the National Park Service. The commercials featured violin music and a “This Land is Your Land” overture, combined with hazy, glowing screenshots of the abandoned rooms of Ellis Island. One scene featured actor Carmine Giovinazzo, whose one grandfather came over from Naples and the other from Norway, both in 1923, he explained: “To be only second generation American is pretty amazing, and when you think about what they [the immigrants] did, it really makes you realize how good we have it.” He sits, plainly, in one of the abandoned, dilapidated rooms. He shares his story, and evokes the spirit in the buildings. “We all are a part of Ellis Island,” he closes, and the screen fades to black, with white text that reads, “ELLIS ISLAND is a place where the world came together and a new American style began.”¹²

The foundation also helped bring about the first restoration of a building on the south side of the island, the Ferry Building. It opened to the public in 2007 with an exhibit exploring the island’s hospital and immigrant health inspection. While the Ellis Island Immigration Museum

¹⁰ David M. Halbfinger, “Trying to Save Ellis Island, The Neglected ‘Sad Side,’ *NYT*, June 16, 1997.

¹¹ Maria Newman, “The Rust Must Go, But the Ghosts Linger; Restoring Ellis Island’s Forgotten Side,” *NYT*, August 13, 2001.

¹² “Carmine Giovinazzo Save Ellis Island Story,” posted September 1, 2007, http://youtube.com/watch?v=T_IpomxUk5s (accessed March 22, 2008); and “Katharine McPhee – Save Ellis Island,” posted August 20, 2007, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=xESMd2yY5VE> (accessed March 22, 2008). The celebrity campaign also featured Kristin Cavallari, John Lloyd Young, Elliot Gould, Joe Montana, and Christian Slater.

receives over two million visitors a year, 1,209 of those visitors took a guided tour of the Ferry Building in the first four months of its opening.¹³

In May, the National Park Service listed the Ellis Island Institute and Conference Center as the preferred development option in its Development Concept Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Institute's mission, not unlike that of the Tenement Museum, is to "use the power of place on Ellis Island to explore the issues of immigration, diversity and human health, past and present, through high level conferences and seminars, and through exhibits, ethnic festivals, music and film festivals, theater and other public programming." The proposed Ellis Island Institute would interpret some building areas for public tours, including the hospital's operating room, measles ward, laundry, morgue and powerhouse. It would utilize the Recreation Building's original 1930s stage and projection both for performances. Conferences, exhibits and classrooms would inhabit the Baggage and Dormitory Building, the island's largest building yet unpreserved.¹⁴

The state of New Jersey won over some more of its claim on the immigrant narrative when a 1998 U.S. Supreme Court ruling maintained that most of the Ellis Island's land, which was added after 1834, is within the territory of New Jersey. Liberty State Park has taken a more active role in its historic interpretation. It now offers "Historic Interpretive Bike Tours" through the park, and in the CRRNJ Terminal, programs about the building's architectural history, "All

¹³ Sovereignty over Ellis Island is shared by New York and New Jersey. The 22.5-acre New Jersey portion falls under the jurisdiction of Jersey City.

¹⁴ Save Ellis Island! *Newsletter* (Fall 2007), http://www.saveellisland.org/site/PageServer?pagename=newsletter_fall2007#fei (accessed April 8, 2008).

Aboard,” and about transportation history and the Central Rail Road company, called “Trails to Rails” and “The Big Little RR.”¹⁵

The Jersey City view of Manhattan, long heralded by residents and Liberty State Park goers, changed in 2001. In a move telling of the role Ellis Island now plays in our national narrative, on the first anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush gave his formal address to the nation from Ellis Island.¹⁶ In the following years, a new fundraising campaign began for the monuments, this time for security upgrades. American Express promised to make a donation to the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation every time its customers used the card.¹⁷ Visiting the monuments today is like visiting an airport, with security complete with x-ray machines and metal detectors.

The Jersey City skyline itself has changed, opening up to towering office buildings and luxury condominiums, development along what is called the “gold coast.” The improvements come as a welcome to many, but to some, as one journalist wrote, “the development juggernaut is rending the social fabric, displacing old-timers and drawing the kinds of people who work, shop and play in Manhattan while using Jersey City as a place to sleep.” The poor, unskilled, and recent immigrants can not even apply for jobs along the waterfront, where the abandoned train yards and rotting piers gave way to a marina, promenades, and more condos. In 2000, the city advertised itself to be “America’s Golden Door.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Friends of Liberty State Park, “Upcoming History Programs,”

http://www.folsp.org/LSP_Terminal_Events_2008%5B.pdf/ (accessed April 10, 2008).

¹⁶ George W. Bush, Address to the Nation on the Anniversary of the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, September 11, 2002, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=62948> (accessed April 1, 2008).

¹⁷ “Help Reopen Lady Liberty,” American Express magazine advertisement, Folder: Statue of Liberty 1987-2005, NJ Room, JCPL.

¹⁸ Andrew Jacobs, “A City Whose Times Has Come Again; After Years of Deprivation, Jersey City, and Old Industrial Powerhouse, Is Remaking Itself,” *NYT*, April 30, 2000.

This thesis has explained how these sites alongside the Statue of Liberty have contributed to the public's understanding of the immigrant's role in American history. A clearer understanding of American society in the 1980s provides a clearer understanding of where American society is today, and where it has the potential to go in the future.

– APPENDICES –

- A. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty (October 28, 1936)
- B. Frank Sinatra, “The House I Live In,” Lyrics (1945)
- C. Lyndon B. Johnson, Proclamation Adding Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty (May 12, 1965)
- D. Brendan Byrne, Proclamation 65, Creation of an Ethnic Advisory Council (April 11, 1978)
- E. Ronald Reagan, “National Immigrant’s Day” Proclamation (July 2, 1986)

A. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, October 28th, 1936¹

Mr. Ambassador, Secretary Ickes, Governor Lehman, Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen:

Fifty years ago our old neighbor and friend from across the sea gave us this monument to stand at the principal eastern gateway to the New World. Grover Cleveland, President of the United States, accepted this gift with the pledge that "We will not forget that liberty has here made her home; nor shall her chosen altar be neglected." During those fifty years that covenant between ourselves and our most cherished convictions has not been broken.

Four hundred years ago, in Europe as well as in Asia, there was little hope of liberty for the average men of courage and goodwill. The ambitions of a ruling class and the times alike conspired against liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of the person, liberty of economic opportunity. Wars, dynastic and religious, had exhausted both the substance and the tolerance of the Old World. There was neither economic nor political liberty—nor any hope for either.

Then came one of the great ironies of history. Rulers needed to find gold to pay their armies and increase their power over the common men. The seamen they sent to find that gold found instead the way of escape for the common man from those rulers. What they found over the Western horizon was not the silk and jewels of Cathay but mankind's second chance—a chance to create a new world after he had almost spoiled an old one.

And the Almighty seems purposefully to have withheld that second chance until the time when men would most need and appreciate liberty, the time when men would be enlightened enough to establish it on foundations sound enough to maintain it.

For over three centuries a steady stream of men, women and children followed the beacon of liberty which this light symbolizes. They brought to us strength and moral fibre developed in a civilization centuries old but fired anew by the dream of a better life in America. They brought to one new country the cultures of a hundred old ones.

It has not been sufficiently emphasized in the teaching of our history that the overwhelming majority of those who came from the Nations of the Old World to our American shores were not the laggards, not the timorous, not the failures. They were men and women who had the supreme courage to strike out for themselves, to abandon language and relatives, to start at the bottom without influence, without money and without knowledge of life in a very young civilization. We can say for all America what the Californians say of the Forty-Niners: "The cowards never started and the weak died by the way."

Perhaps Providence did prepare this American continent to be a place of the second chance. Certainly, millions of men and women have made it that. They adopted this homeland because in

¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Address on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty," October 28, 1936, in *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15210&st=&st1=> (accessed January 20, 2008).

this land they found a home in which the things they most desired could be theirs—freedom of opportunity, freedom of thought, freedom to worship God. Here they found life because here there was freedom to live.

It is the memory of all these eager seeking millions that makes this one of America's places of great romance. Looking down this great harbor I like to think of the countless numbers of inbound vessels that have made this port. I like to think of the men and women who, with the break of dawn off Sandy Hook, have strained their eyes to the west for a first glimpse of the New World.

They came to us—most of them—in steerage. But they, in their humble quarters, saw things in these strange horizons which were denied to the eyes of those few who traveled in greater luxury.

They came to us speaking many tongues—but a single language, the universal language of human aspiration.

How well their hopes were justified is proved by the record of what they achieved. They not only found freedom in the New World, but by their effort and devotion they made the New World's freedom safer, richer, more far-reaching, more capable of growth.

Within this present generation, that stream from abroad has largely stopped. We have within our shores today the materials out of which we shall continue to build an even better home for liberty.

We take satisfaction in the thought that those who have left their native land to join us may still retain here their affection for some things left behind—old customs, old language, old friends. Looking to the future, they wisely choose that their children shall live in the new language and in the new customs of this new people. And those children more and more realize their common destiny in America. That is true whether their forebears came past this place eight generations ago or only one.

The realization that we are all bound together by hope of a common future rather than by reverence for a common past has helped us to build upon this continent a unity unapproached in any similar area or population in the whole world. For all our millions of square miles, for all our millions of people, there is a unity in language and speech, in law and in economics, in education and in general purpose, which nowhere finds its match.

It was the hope of those who gave us this Statue and the hope of the American people in receiving it that the Goddess of Liberty and the Goddess of Peace were the same.

The grandfather of my old friend the French Ambassador, and those who helped him make this gift possible, were citizens of a great sister Republic established on the principle of the democratic form of government. Citizens of all democracies unite in their desire for peace. Grover Cleveland recognized that unity of purpose on this spot fifty years ago.

He suggested that liberty enlightening the world would extend her rays from these shores to every other Nation.

Today that symbolism should be broadened. To the message of liberty which America sends to all the world must be added her message of peace.

Even in times as troubled and uncertain as these, I still hold to the faith that a better civilization than any we have known is in store for America and by our example, perhaps, for the world. Here destiny seems to have taken a long look. Into this continental reservoir there has been poured untold and untapped wealth of human resources. Out of that reservoir, out of the melting pot, the rich promise which the New World held out to those who came to it from many lands is finding fulfillment.

The richness of the promise has not run out. If we keep the faith for our day as those who came before us kept the faith for theirs, then you and I can smile with confidence into the future.

It is fitting, therefore, that this should be a service of rededication to the liberty and the peace which this Statue symbolizes. Liberty and peace are living things. In each generation—if they are to be maintained—they must be guarded and vitalized anew.

We do only a small part of our duty to America when we glory in the great past. Patriotism that stops with that is a too-easy patriotism— a patriotism out of step with the patriots themselves. For each generation the more patriotic part is to carry forward American freedom and American peace by making them living facts in a living present.

To that we can, we do, rededicate ourselves.

B. Frank Sinatra, “The House I Live In” (1945)²

What is America to me
A name, a map, or a flag I see
A certain word, democracy
What is America to me

The house I live in
A plot of earth, a street
The grocer and the butcher
And the people that I meet

The children in the playground
The faces that I see
All races and religions
That's America to me

The place I work in
The worker by my side
The little town or city
Where my people lived and died

The howdy and the handshake
The air of feeling free
And the right to speak my mind out
That's America to me

The things I see about me
The big things and the small
The little corner newsstand
And the house a mile tall

The wedding and the churchyard
The laughter and the tears
The dream that's been a growing
For a hundred and fifty years

The town I live in
The street, the house, the room
The pavement of the city
Or a garden all in bloom

The church the school the clubhouse
The million lights I see
But especially the people
That's America to me

² The House I Live In,” words by Louis Allen, music by Early Robinson (1942), in *Of Thee I Sing: Lyrics and Music for America's Most Patriotic Songs*, ed. Jerry Silverman, 208-212 (New York: Citadel Press, 2002).

C. President Lyndon B. Johnson, Proclamation Adding Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty³

Proclamation 3656

ADDING ELLIS ISLAND TO THE STATUE OF LIBERTY NATIONAL MONUMENT

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

WHEREAS Ellis Island in 1890 was placed under the control of the Federal Bureau of Immigration for development as an immigration station; and

WHEREAS between the years 1892 and 1954 Ellis Island was host to more than 16 million aliens entering this country; and

WHEREAS Ellis Island was a temporary shelter for those who sought refuge, freedom, and opportunity in our country; and

WHEREAS the millions of people who passed through the Ellis Island Depot were important to America for their contribution in making the United States of America the world leader it is today; and

WHEREAS the Statue of Liberty is a symbol to the world of the dreams and aspirations which have drawn so many millions of immigrants to America; and

WHEREAS to all Americans the Statue of Liberty stands eternal as the symbol of the freedom which has been made a living reality in the United States for men of all races, creeds, and national origins who have united in allegiance to the Constitution of the United States and to the imperishable ideals of our free society ; and

WHEREAS, by Proclamation No. 1713 of October 15, 1924 (43 Stat. 1968), the Statue of Liberty and the land on which it is situated were established as a national monument in accordance with section 2 of the Act of Congress approved June 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 225; 16 U.S.C. 431); and

WHEREAS Ellis Island, consisting of approximately 27.5 acres, with improvements thereon, and of submerged lands in the rectangle surrounding the island, including the above acreage, aggregating 48 acres, is owned and controlled by the United States; and

WHEREAS the public interest would be promoted by reserving this area for proper protection and preservation as the Statue of Liberty National Monument:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LYNDON B. JOHNSON, President of the United States of America, under and by virtue of the authority vested in me by section 2 of the Act of Congress approved June 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 225; 16 U.S.C. 431), do proclaim that the property known as Ellis Island, as described in the preamble of this Proclamation, which is owned and controlled by the United States is hereby added to and

³ President Lyndon B. Johnson, Proclamation Adding Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75266> (accessed April 9, 2008).

made a part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, subject to the limitation contained in the last sentence of this paragraph, and shall be administered pursuant to the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535; 16 U.S.C., secs. 1-3), and acts supplementary thereto and amendatory thereof. Henceforth the Statue of Liberty National Monument shall consist of the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Island, and Ellis Island. Unless provided otherwise by Act of Congress, no funds appropriated to the Department of the Interior for the Administration of the National Monument shall be expended upon the development of Ellis Island.

Warning is hereby expressly given to all unauthorized persons not to appropriate, injure, destroy, or remove any feature of the National Monument.

So much of Proclamation No. 1713 of October 15, 1924, as relates to Fort Wood, New York, and the Statue of Liberty and the land on which it is situated, is hereby superseded.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States of America to be affixed.

DONE at the City of Washington this eleventh day of May in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and sixty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and eighty-ninth.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

By the President:

DEAN RUSK,
Secretary of State.

[F.R. Doc. 65-5141; Filed, May 12, 1965; 10:06 a.m.]

B. Gov. Brendan Byrne's Proclamation 65, Creation of an Ethnic Advisory Council⁴

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EXECUTIVE ORDERS

STATE OF NEW JERSEY,
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT.

EXECUTIVE ORDER No. 65

WHEREAS, The Executive Branch of State Government recognizes that the State of New Jersey is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse States of the fifty United States; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey served as the gateway to the United States for many immigrant ethnic groups, which is of historical significance to the country because of the major role these groups played in the growth and development of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The State's ethnic communities are of historical significance to the State of New Jersey by virtue of the many contributions their members have made to the State's growth, development and governance, contributions which should be recorded and shared with all of the people of the State; and

WHEREAS, The wide variety of customs, languages and histories of these varied ethnic groups significantly enhances and enriches the quality of the State's social and cultural life; and

WHEREAS, The State has previously recognized and supported its ethnic communities through the New Jersey Bicentennial Ethnic Council, the re-opening of Ellis Island as a National Park and the beginning of the Liberty Park Complex, the Heritage Festivals held at the Garden State Arts Center, and the Inter-Cultural Relations and Ethnic Studies Institute in the Rutgers University Graduate Department of Education; and

WHEREAS, Awareness, appreciation and understanding of these many ethnic groups would contribute to the quality of life in the State by affirming our unity within a framework of cultural diversity; and

WHEREAS, The ethnic communities in the State need still greater attention and support from the government of the State and should play a significant role in shaping the State's approach to their culture, history and needs.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Brendan Byrne, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the statutes of this State, do hereby ORDER and DIRECT:

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

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1. There is hereby created an Ethnic Advisory Council which shall advise the Governor and recommend programs and other efforts the State shall engage in regarding ethnic communities;

(a) The Council shall consist of 16 members appointed by the Governor at least 11 of whom shall be representatives of ethnic communities within the State of New Jersey. In selecting the Council membership, consideration should be given to appointing as broad a representative sample as possible of New Jersey's ethnic communities.

(b) The Commissioners of the Department of Community Affairs and Education, the Chancellor of Higher Education, the Chairman of the State Council on the Arts or their designees, and the Ethnic Community Liaison appointed by the Governor shall serve on the Council in an ex-officio capacity.

(c) All members of the Council shall be residents of the State, and shall be appointed for terms of 2 years, except that of the members initially appointed, 8 shall be appointed for a term of 1 year, and 8 for a term of 2 years. The term of each of the members first appointed shall be designated by the Governor at the time of appointment.

(d) Each Council member shall hold office for the term of the appointment and until a successor shall have been qualified and appointed. Members shall not serve more than two consecutive terms notwithstanding the fact that the initial term might be less than 2 years or for the completion of an unexpired term.

(e) Council vacancies shall be filled by appointment by the Governor for the remainder of the unexpired term.

(f) The Governor shall designate the Chairman of the Council from among the members of the Council. The Chairman shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor.

(g) The Council shall organize itself in any manner it deems appropriate and enact by-laws as deemed necessary to carry forth the responsibilities of the Council.

2. The Council shall meet formally at least four times a year at the call of the chairman. The Council shall report annually to the Governor as to the activities of the Council.

3. The Council may make recommendations to the Governor concerning ethnic studies programs offered in the State's public

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EXECUTIVE ORDERS

schools, colleges, and the State University; the participation of ethnic organizations in providing community and social services; the promotion of ethnic and cultural events; the development of policies effecting ethnic neighborhoods; increasing knowledge and public awareness in ethnic history and culture; the participation of ethnic groups in governmental affairs; and such other matters as deemed appropriate to the purpose of this Executive Order.

4. Members of the Council are hereby charged with consulting with all segments of the State's ethnic communities to invite ideas and solicit suggestions in furtherance of this Executive Order.

Given, under my hand and seal this eleventh day of
[SEAL] April in the year of Our Lord, one thousand nine
hundred and seventy-eight, and of the Independence
of the United States, the two hundred and second.

/s/ BRENDAN BYRNE,
Governor.
Attest:
ROBERT E. MULCAHY, III,
Chief of Staff, Secretary.

⁴ Brendan Byrne, "Executive Order No. 65," Ethnic Advisory Council created, April 11, 1978, 980-982, Executive Orders 1-113 of Governor Brendan T. Byrne (1974-1981), *New Jersey Digital Legal Library*, Rutgers University, <http://njlegallib.rutgers.edu/eo/byrne.php> (accessed April 8, 2008).

F. Ronald Reagan, Proclamation 5510, National Immigrants Day, 1986⁵

Proclamation 5510—

National Immigrants Day, 1986 July 2nd

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Since 1820, more than 52 million immigrants have come to the United States from all over the world. They have sought and found a new and better life for themselves and their children in this land of liberty and opportunity. The magnet that draws them is freedom and the beacon that guides them is hope. America offers liberty for all, encourages hope for betterment, and nurtures great expectations. In this free land a person can realize his dreams—going as far as talent and drive can carry him. In return America asks each of us to do our best, to work hard, to respect the law, to cherish human rights, and to strive for the common good.

The immigrants who have so enriched America include people from every race, creed, and ethnic background. Yet all have been drawn here by shared values and a deep love of freedom. Most brought with them few material goods. But with their hearts and minds and toil they have contributed mightily to the building of this great Nation and endowed us with the riches of their achievements. Their spirit continues to nourish our own love of freedom and opportunity.

For more than three centuries, a human tide of men, women, and children have become new Americans. They have brought to us strength and moral fiber developed in civilizations centuries old, but fired anew by the dream of a better life in America. They have brought to us in this young country the treasure of a hundred ancient cultures. Their dreams gave them the courage to strike out for themselves, to leave behind familiar scenes, to part with friends and relatives, and to start a new life in a new land. The record of their success in every field of human endeavor is one of our proudest boasts. They have helped to make us the great Nation we are today.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 290, has designated July 4, 1986, as "National Immigrants Day" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

Now, Therefore, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim July 4, 1986, as National Immigrants Day, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this 2nd day of July, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

RONALD REAGAN

⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 5510 – National Immigrants Day, 1986," July 2, 1986, in *American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=37543&st=&st1=> (accessed February 20, 2008).

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Footnote Abbreviations

Liberty State Park Papers of Audrey and Warren Zapp (1958-1994)	Zapp Papers
Lower East Side Tenement Museum	LESTM
Office of Ethnic Affairs, Records (1978-1992)	OEA
New Jersey Room Collection	NJR
Statue of Liberty Press Clippings 1986	STLI 1986

Collections and Archives

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